

A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES

FROM AN ANONYMOUS GIFT TO AN AUSPICIOUS AUCTION, ALL SIGNS POINTED
TO 'GO' FOR TWO CHURCHES GETTING NEW HOMES THIS YEAR



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The Rev. Jon Robbins, founding rector of St. Paul's Church in Vero Beach, talks with animation about the church's beginnings in 2011. "After intense prayer sessions with the congregation, the church was named in honor of the great missionary preacher St. Paul," he says. "It was St. Paul who implemented God's plan to reconcile people to him through Jesus."

Now amidst much joy, a new St. Paul's structure is rising on Flamevine Lane. According to Robbins, for three years the congregation had been searching for property to build on or an existing building to renovate. For several years they worshipped out of the Surf Club on A1A and then, more recently, at the Garden Club on 17th Avenue.

One glorious day, an anonymous benefactor presented the congregation with a beautiful lot on Flamevine Lane, close to Ocean Drive.

"An amazing gift," Robbins says. "And we all knew it would be our goal to build a beautiful building. To create a church that would be a blessing and an asset to the beach community."

Robbins and the church vestry interviewed a number of local architects and builders. Eventually, they hired Alan Matthews of C.E. Block Architect Inc. as the designer and architectural project manager. His plans skillfully interpreted the church's vision.

"St. Paul's is on a small site and required careful planning to accomplish its many goals," Matthews says. "The best option was a two-story building that had the worship area on the first floor and the classrooms and office area on the second. I worked with a committee of people experienced in church functions and worship to create quality design and to convey a sense of place for inspired Anglican religious worship."

The church broke ground at 999 Flamevine Lane

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shortly after the site's former building that housed dental offices was razed, and they held a groundbreaking ceremony on the property in May. "The Anglican Bishop Ron Kuykendall from Gainesville attended," Robbins says. "He led us all in prayers to spiritually cleanse the property and set it apart for the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

As the parishioners gathered in the parking lot, each carried a palm frond. The Bishop and Robbins led the procession from the parking lot to the site of the church. The rector led the

litany. The congregation said the Lord's Prayer. The service followed an Anglican groundbreaking rite, rendering the property a sacred space.

"From the beginning, our goal was to build a breathtaking holy place ... a church for tourists and longtime residents to come for prayer and comfort," Robbins says. "Traditionally, Anglicans have seen architecture playing a critical role in creating a sacred space where people can experience the presence of the Lord. Examples are the high-vaulted ceiling in the nave and the cruciform in the floor plan that relate back to the Gothic period of the Middle Ages." He said the congregation will face east, following an ancient tradition to worship in the direction from which Jesus is expected to return.

Continuing, Robbins adds, "It seemed fitting to honor the history of the beach area and pay homage to one of Vero Beach's founding fathers, Waldo Sexton, and his creations — the Driftwood Inn and Ocean Grill — by incorporating driftwood and wrought iron into the church. We hope people will say upon entering St. Paul's, 'Waldo would be pleased.'"

Jan Jelmy, who owns Helmet House Construction with his wife, Rhoda, comes from a long line of Swedish church builders and has constructed the



A rendering of St. Paul's Church shows how it will look when it's completed this summer. The lancet windows and doorway are characteristic of Gothic architecture of the 13th century. The Celtic Cross harkens back to the early Middle Ages in Ireland and England.



The congregation has been worshipping at the Garden Club during construction of the church.



The church under construction, about halfway through the process.

6,500-square-foot structure with meticulous care, using superior woods and other fine materials.

Jelmby notes that Helmet House is a full service company. “We help out with the difficult task of material selection, sometimes importing materials from abroad. Years ago, in Jerusalem, Rhoda and I encountered a beautiful and architecturally pleasing Anglican church inside the Old City dating to the 1840s,” he remembers. “We took photos of the church and noted elements from it that we filed away; many of these Old World details are now being applied to the new St. Paul’s Church.”

Toby Arnheim, a member of St. Paul’s Church, volunteered to act as building manager to oversee the project from the church’s perspective. He recently retired from large projects in construction and brings 58 years of expertise with him.

“I kept working because I didn’t know how to go into retirement. My work was my hobby and creative outlet,” Arnheim says. “On the day I finally retired, Pastor Jon asked me to help find a home for the church. I have been blessed with great opportunities during my long career and the finale beats them all.”

Robbins feels compelled by missionary zeal and a desire to reach the outside world in three ways: a children’s ministry, a healing ministry and missions that are local, national and international. In the new space, there is more room for the children’s minister to oversee a meaningful and safe program for kids while parents attend service. In addition, a mom’s prayer group, which also makes gift baskets for deployed soldiers, will have better facilities.

“Our biggest challenge,” Robbins says, “is to bring the ministry to those who need it.” He says the church offers an 8 a.m. contemplative service on Sunday that appeals to those who love the historic roots of the church and a more contemporary service at 10 a.m. in which the congregation sings hymns and contemporary worship songs. “We alert the community to our healing prayer services that provide emotional and spiritual support,” Robbins says. “Extending the ministry of Jesus is fundamental to St. Paul’s. I can say with certainty that no one turns down prayer.”

Robbins continues, “The church is a launching pad to strengthen all our programs and missions. Our motto is: ‘Bringing Christ to the World.’ To have a vision for the world like St. Paul’s vision. To follow in his footsteps. To practice what the Bible calls ‘shameless audacity!’”

Across town, on the corner of 20th Street and 6th Avenue, another Anglican church has been rising. By early summer, Christ Church Vero Beach will have a new and greatly enlarged church campus.

When the Rt. Rev. John Miller was interviewed in 2012 for the position of Christ Church rector, he told the vestry that building a new church was not a priority of his.



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“I had been a missionary bishop and felt the congregation needed a mission and a vision,” Miller says. “I thought of the church’s location as a positive example of ‘Christ in culture.’”

Christ Church was located next to a bowling alley in a strip mall off U.S. 1 and 14th Lane. Within a year of Miller being hired, a bay adjacent to the church became available for lease. It would add 10,000 feet to the church area, bringing it to a total of 30,000 square feet. Together the rector and his vestry agreed to lease it. Subsequently they oversaw an extensive renovation of the bay.

Within days of the new bay lease being signed, an extensive property in a prime Vero Beach spot became available. After the church deemed the property worthy of pursuit and the necessary funds were raised, Miller and 12 parishioners attended the auction.

“We prayed together. And I decided if God wanted us to

The architect’s rendering of Christ Church shows the range of the buildings of the church campus. The cupola rises above the area where the font is located. The architect says, “This acknowledges the entry of the believer into fellowship.” Right: The photo of the entrance to the community wing during mid-construction shows the unfinished porch and the cupola off to the side.

have this property he would give us a sign. There were several other bidding groups. One by one they dropped out,” Miller remembers. “After the auction, one bidder commented to me that he didn’t want to bid against God. By the end of the auction, the property was ours. This was the sure sign that God wanted us to build a church on the site.”

On Jan. 8, 2014, the church closed on the 14-acre piece of property. There was great joy in the parish but also the stark realization that a large sum of money was needed for the construction of the new church, in addition to what had been spent renovating the new bay.

In late 2015, a team of parishioners joined forces to raise the money through direct donations and pledges of the church’s 250 members. They raised 99 percent of the money necessary to construct the new facility.

“It was an amazing effort. The results were truly miraculous,” Miller says, noting that this allows more funding for outreach.

The church’s building committee interviewed a number of local and out-of-state architects. Research revealed an architect from Chattanooga, Tennessee, who had designed over 400 churches. After an extensive interview process, the committee selected that architect, Steve Carroll of Rardin and Carroll Architects. Carroll had scrupulously read Miller’s mission and



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vision statements, and his drawings reflected the goals Christ Church sought in their new buildings and campus. Along with studying the church’s history, Carroll interviewed Miller and members of the vestry and congregation. His idea was to design a “lighthouse” that would enhance the church’s mission.

Carroll says, “Pastor John’s focus on community outreach, worship and discipleship determined the main elements of the design. The church’s front entrance addresses the intersection of State Road 60 and 6th Avenue with an open inviting courtyard and gathering space for arrival and outdoor functions. The community wing faces State Road 60 with a separate entrance

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to facilitate outreach and demonstrate the transparency of Christ Church's mission to the community."

The variety of spaces Carroll created stemmed from the specific needs of the church's activities. A large, modern community space accommodates the residents of Vero Beach, many of whom are not church members but are encouraged to attend church functions. An ample "living room for fellowship" with a coffee bar and adjacent kitchen is the first room one encounters upon entering the main door. It is meant to welcome people. In the hopes of attracting more young families to the church, the children's indoor area has been increased by 60 percent, along with two state-of-the-art playgrounds.

Carroll even designed a "crying room," where mothers can take their babies during the service. From the room, they can see the service through a one-way window.

Christ Church hired Proctor Construction Company, which specializes in commercial, industrial and institutional projects, to build the church campus. Miller says working with Proctor has been a positive experience — "with work coming in on the early side."

"As the project progressed my heart changed dramatically from being hesitant to fully embracing it," Miller says. "I saw God's hand in it. God's fingerprints were everywhere."

In addition to two traditional Sunday worship services, Christ Church holds an alternative informal worship service. Wanting to reach out to the young or alienated, the church envisioned an entry-level service that has no ushers, no organ, no elaborate vestments. Drums and symbols provide a contemporary sound. The informal atmosphere appeals to as many as 90 worshippers each Sunday from the community whom Richard Demsick, the church's missionary pastor, has recruited.

Miller says, "You'll never hear us change the message of the Gospel, for Christ Church was founded on the authority of Scripture, but we must adapt to the culture by changing some of our methodology."

Since its founding, Christ Church has been engaging the community in many creative ways; now the new facilities will enable the church to expand many of its outreach activities.

The wide-ranging programs offered include: "Road to Recovery" for various addictions; an exercise program based on the scriptures for the mind, body and spirit; a Halloween-alternative event with games and treats; a Christmas breakfast with Santa for kids; a weekly spirituality program for children 2 to 4 years old; Biblical

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The Christ Church Vero Beach congregation currently worships in a leased property next to a bowling alley.

studies; an annual luncheon for veterans; and grief share counseling. All together, Christ Church sponsored 593 events in 2016. Most of the events are free; a few charge a minimum fee.

"We want to inspire people to have a relationship with God. To engage people, to disciple them, to bring them into the kingdom," Miller says. "We want to practice humility and love and plant seeds, to find ways to break down barriers and bring people to the Lord through Christ Church." ☪