

# *The Parish of the Epiphany*

*Winchester, Massachusetts*

*1882 - 1984*

*by R. Alan Page  
1985*

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The Parish of the Epiphany, formally organized as a mission in 1882, built a modest church on loaned land in 1884, engaged the Reverend John W. Suter, a deacon, as minister in charge in 1885, and in 1887 relinquished all financial aid from the diocese. In April 1888, the formal organization of the Parish of the Epiphany took place with Mr. Suter, now a fully ordained priest, elected as the first rector. Under his leadership, the young church flourished to such an extent that by 1890 serious attention was given to the need for expansion. In view of the space limitations of its location, the parish purchased in 1893 a corner lot of approximately one acre at the geographical center of the town, the present location of the church.

By 1904, sufficient funds were on hand to proceed with the construction of a new church, designed by Frank Patterson Smith, architect. The cornerstone was laid on October 20, 1904, and completion of work was marked by the first service in the new building on October 8, 1905. The creation of the new church, with its impressive American Gothic design, inspiring worship, was in large part the result of the dynamic leadership of Mr. Suter. His vision and his faith in the ability of the parish to accomplish its goal is evident throughout his rectorate. He drew up a master plan for beautifying the new church; in fact, his schedule of subjects for the stained glass windows was carefully followed until the final window had been installed some seventy years later. After retiring in 1912, he continued, as Rector Honorarius, to be a member of the Vestry Committee for Gifts and Memorials.

Music was considered an important part of the life of the young parish and twenty-five percent of the annual budget was allocated to it. This enabled the church to engage and retain for twenty years the services of an outstanding choirmaster to train and lead a paid choir of men and boys whose excellence was recognized throughout the local area.

In 1910, the first of several extensions to the parish house was built to supply badly needed space for the church school. During Mr. Suter's ministry, the parish did not neglect its larger responsibilities to the diocese. It loaned the services of the rector to neighboring missions and churches in addition to fulfilling its diocesan obligations. As a result of his leadership and organizational abilities, Mr. Suter was called to work on a diocesan level and resigned as of January 1, 1912. The parish made strenuous efforts to persuade him to reconsider, even sending the entire Vestry as a body to his home.

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The next twenty years, 1912-1931, proved a difficult testing period for the parish, two rectors serving for relatively brief periods and the third a longer but interrupted one. The ten-year rectorate of the Rev. Murray W. Dewart witnessed some notable achievements: a second addition to the parish house, the purchase of a rectory, the publishing of a parish leaflet, continued strong support for the music program and in 1921, the termination of pew rentals, a radical step at the time. During Mr. Dewart's extended absence as a military chaplain, the Rev. William S. Packer, a member of the parish, served as priest-in-charge with selfless devotion, especially during the influenza epidemic at the end of the war.

The rectorate of the Rev. Allen Evans, Jr., saw a third and major addition to the parish house to accommodate the growing church school and to provide badly needed office space. After only four years, Mr. Evans resigned, and in August, 1927, the Rev. Truman Heminway succeeded him. It soon became clear that the parish had overextended itself and that the monetary and spiritual support for the current program was lacking. The ambitious music program, with its large paid choir of men and boys, was the first to be pared. With a \$35,000 mortgage resulting from the latest addition to the parish house, the ravages of the Great Depression and the resignation of Mr. Heminway in May 1931, a spirit of discouragement prevailed.

The choice of the Rev. Dwight W. Hadley in September, 1931, was a happy one. He was uniquely endowed with the qualities to guide the parish through the long task of rebuilding which lay ahead. Quietly and sympathetically, he instilled confidence, so that the parish started to move forward slowly, meeting the annual budget and making small reductions in the debt, no mean achievement in the Depression years. In 1940, funds were donated to the parish to erect a memorial bell tower designed by the same architect who had drawn up plans for the church 35 years before. By the end of World War II, it was obvious the parish had recovered from the Depression. Church attendance had increased, the church school had grown impressively, the mortgage had been paid off and major modernization and replacement of the heating system had been accomplished. After twenty-one years of making personal and parish problems his own, Mr. Hadley's health failed, and it became necessary for him to resign in June 1952.

After fourteen months of thoughtful search, the parish welcomed its sixth rector, the Rev. Dr. John W. Ellison in May, 1953. A strong lay leadership, headed by Albert S. Crockett, Senior Warden, had kept the parish moving forward during the interim and stood ready to respond to the stimulus of a younger rector. The January 1954 parish meeting voted a resolution stating that the objectives of the parish were to increase missionary efforts inside and outside the diocese and to expand Christian education. Various committees were formed to implement these objectives and numerous projects were financed, such as underwriting the education of a young student from the Church of South India at the Episcopal Theological School, assisting the mission in Chelmsford, supporting a group of Hungarian refugees and nu-

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merous other outreach projects. In 1956, the Rev. Ralph B. Putney joined the parish as Assistant Rector and continued to serve after his retirement until 1978. He was a valuable assistant to two rectors and a beloved friend of the parishioners.

Education became one of the unique marks of Dr. Ellison's ministry. He came to the Epiphany at a time when the national church had initiated its new program that resulted in the publishing of the Seabury Series. The parish became a model and "laboratory" for testing the new materials coming from the national church. The Rev. Charles E. Batten joined the staff and his parents' classes and other courses, designed by Dr. Ellison and him, were supported by many members. He joined with Dr. Donald E. McLean, a member of the parish, in pioneering programs of sex education for young people. Their book, *Fit to be Tied*, was used widely throughout the country by the Episcopal Church and several other denominations as well. Dr. Ellison gained national attention when he became the first person to use an electronic computer for studies in the humanities and produced the Concordance for the Revised Standard Version of the Bible in 1957.

During the early years of Dr. Ellison's rectorate, the parish doubled in size, making it necessary to expand facilities. In 1958, the parish voted to raise \$225,000 for a new parish hall with basement classrooms. The building forms the fourth side of a quadrangle, enclosing a lovely cloister garden. The hall, named for the Rev. Dwight W. Hadley, was dedicated in December, 1959. Renovations of the parish house included the construction of a chapel, dedicated to Dr. Batten who had died shortly before.

In 1957 the parish voted to open all parish offices to women, and Marion Grush was the first woman elected to serve on the Vestry. In January, 1966, Epiphany lost a gifted teacher and preacher when Dr. Ellison accepted a call to a new parish and resigned.

The seventh and present rector of Epiphany, the Rev. John J. Bishop, conducted his first service on August 1, 1966. In the fall of 1967, the newly-appointed curate, the Rev. J. Michael Jupin, turned in his draft card in protest of the United States involvement in Viet Nam. Over the next four years, parish life, in a sense, became a microcosm of national life with all the pain and bitter divisions created by the conflict in Southeast Asia. The need for that moment was a ministry of reconciliation, honoring both the prophetic and pastoral elements and calling for the creation of a climate in which those on opposite sides of this tragic issue could come together, be with one another and listen to one another. Under Mr. Bishop's courageous leadership, that need was met, and a parish family, blessed by the grace of God, grew stronger in the 1970's.

It was during this period of unrest that the parish leadership, clergy and lay alike, identified new concepts of mission and ministry, stressing primary concern for the urban poor. On the local scene, clergy participated in the ecumenical ministries that addressed alcohol and drug abuse, housing for

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seniors, racism and other concerns of community life.

In the 1970's, the liturgical renewal of the church became a priority in parish life and thanks to the rector's careful preparation and presentation, the 1979 Book of Common Prayer was introduced with a minimum of controversy and protest. At the same time, the parish offered significant leadership in the church's decision to admit women to the ordained ministry. A high point came in the spring of 1976 with the appointment of the Rev. M. Jeanne Sproat as Assistant Rector. On January 15, 1977, the Rt. Rev. John B. Curnburn ordained her to the priesthood—the first woman to be ordained priest in the Diocese of Massachusetts.

The composition of the membership of Epiphany changed greatly after the end of World War II, reflecting changes in the population of Winchester, a bedroom suburb of Boston. From an era when the members were mostly "WASPS," and ushers at Sunday services wore cutaways and striped trousers, the parish now has members from a wide variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Its membership is composed chiefly of men and women who are in professional, managerial and executive positions, with many holding graduate degrees. The parish, like many others, experienced a recession in membership from the high levels of the 50's and 60's, but in the past five years has reported a slow, steady growth to a present count of some 1100 baptized persons and 340 families.

As the Parish of the Epiphany approaches its 100th anniversary in 1988, it can take pride in its present state. It is more than a beautiful set of buildings. It is a people reaching out in love to one another, and beyond the parish, to all members of the human family. It is a community of faith, centered in a eucharistic life and blessed with the inspirational leadership of its clergy and a strong and dedicated laity, all working together in harmony.