



HISTORY OF CHRIST CHURCH

In his address to the Diocesan Convention of May 19, 1892, the Rt. Rev. Cleland Kinloch Nelson, then Bishop of Georgia, named Cordele as one of several towns which needed “to be attacked (to use the warlike phrase proper to a militant church) and to be strongly manned.” He pointed out that Cordele was a place where the church has, as yet, no foothold.

At 10:30 a.m. on November 24, 1894, Bishop Nelson and the Rev. W. Woodson Walker, Rector of Calvary Church, Americus visited Cordele. It is probable that Episcopalians in the community had held meetings in various homes prior to this time, obtaining the services of visiting priests when possible. This was the usual pattern of Episcopal “missionary activity” in Georgia until the latter nineteenth century and continued until congregations were able to erect church buildings.

Regrettably, detailed records of the beginnings of Christ Church were lost in 1944 when the priest’s residence burned. However it is known Bishop Nelson and Rev. Walker returned to Cordele in late 1896 and met at the Arthur Kirkland home with D. Ed Kennedy, C.C. Cutts and several others to finalize the organization of the Episcopal Church in Cordele. It is believed a church building was already under construction at the time as the present frame structure was consecrated February 14, 1897. The original instrument of consecration, signed by Bishop Nelson on that day, may be seen in the narthex of the church.

Christ Church, originally, was built on “Gunboat Hill” at the corner of South 9th St. and West 17th Ave. Shortly after the turn of the century, exact date unknown, the building was moved to the intersection of South 7th St. and East 14th Ave. At this time church school rooms were added to the rear of the structure. Moving the church the second time proved to be more difficult than anticipated and, according to newspaper accounts, the church sat almost in the middle of busy U.S. Highway 41 for a part of the time.

Now known as “the most traveled church in the Diocese of Georgia” the original building was moved to its third and present location at South 1st Street and East 15th Avenue in 1952. The first service was held at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, August 8, 1952. On May 10, 1953, Bishop Middleton Stuart Barnwell re-dedicated the twice, transplanted church.

There are many original items that still serve the church. The handmade pews were installed in 1897. A photograph of the church’s interior shows the altar, brass altar cross which is engraved on both sides with different designs, and a pair of flower vases presently in use. Though not dated, we believe these items to be original or from the earliest years of the church. A pair of Eucharistic candlesticks was given in 1944.

A complete interior renovation, including the Sacristy, was done in 2012 which included refinishing the heart-of-pine flooring, cleaning and re-fitting the pews and kneelers, re-carpeting and painting the interior and exterior of the church and the exterior of Holmes Hall.

One of Christ Church’s early priests, the Rev. John M. Walker, later became bishop of The Diocese of Atlanta. It was during his tenure in Cordele that Christ Church purchased its first vicarage in 1915. There have been three other houses to serve as vicarages, the present at 605 15th Avenue, next to the church.

In the late 1950’s, Mrs. Annabelle Holmes donated funds for the construction of a parish hall, dedicated in 1961 as Holmes Hall. During the years the hall was reconfigured and now consists of the dining/meeting room, priest’s office, computer and record room, nursery, youth Sunday School Room, food pantry, storage room, kitchen, rest rooms and library which serves, also, as the adult Sunday School Room. The rear was paved, a roof was added and it now serves as a patio for relaxing and outdoor cooking.

On All Saints Day, 1990 the original parish hall was dedicated and consecrated as All Saints Chapel. Daily Morning Prayer is held there each weekday and other services on occasion.

On December 28, 1994, the Sabra Coleman Memorial Garden was consecrated and blessed by the Rt. Rev. Harry W. Shipps. Mrs. Helen Bowmar was the first member of Christ Church to be interred here on March 18, 1995. Nameplates of members/family members enumerate others now in the garden.

The church was expanded further in the first year of the millennium when the Rt. Rev. Henry I. Louttit granted permission for purchase of the lot adjacent to the vicarage which offers immediate use for recreation, parking and the potential for future growth. A bell tower was added to the church yard while Fr. Jim Parker was our priest.

Christ Church has a small but growing, diverse, giving, caring congregation. We seemed to have moved across the barriers of racial divide without the turmoil that usually accompanies inclusiveness. Fr. Van Rennick broke the color line at the then segregated A.S. Clark School by becoming its first white teacher. The Arthur Jacksons, an Afro-American family were our initial confirmands. Mr. Jackson served on the vestry and paved the way for others seeking a diverse congregation. Women have served our church as visiting priests, vestry wardens and members. The consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson at the 2003 General Convention was accepted and neither fought against nor endorsed.

Memorable times were our 100th Anniversary and briefly becoming a parish during the time Fr. Ed McCoy was priest here.

Christ Church takes pride in its Ministry/Outreach Programs. Significant among these are:

- 1) Worship on the Water, a summer ministry at the Resort dock at Lake Blackshear for lake residents, campers, resort roomers, boaters and others.
- 2) Relay for Life, fundraisers for the American Cancer Society are held by dedicated volunteers and cancer survivors later honored at the Cordele/Crisp Relay for Life Event.
- 3) The Dennis Reddick Memorial Golf Tournament raises funds for the award of scholarships to deserving college-bound area seniors.
- 4) Little Red Wagon Food Pantry donates food to the needy

With the help and support of the newly awarded Church Growth and Development Grant, we are eager to move forward in growth and service.

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