

A Brief History of St. John's Episcopal Church



St. John's Episcopal Church has been a vital presence in the Plymouth, MI area for over one hundred years. It began in 1898 with a small group of women organizing the Women's Guild of St. John's Mission. A Plymouth Mail Newspaper article, dated September 3, 1959, described St. John's beginnings in this way:

“The St. John's Episcopal congregation had its birth in Plymouth during the Spanish-American War year of 1898. Services were first held in the Rebekah Hall on the second floor of the building where Kresge's is now located.”

The first church services were conducted by William D. Sayres, General Missionary of the Diocese of Michigan. By 1900 Charles Ramsay, Diocesan Lay Reader, took over services which were then held Sunday afternoons over Shingleton's Store near the depot. There were ten or twelve persons in attendance. The Woman's Guild busied itself making aprons and quilts, which they sold to defray church expenses. Charles Ramsay later became a deacon and accepted a call elsewhere. St. John's closed for nearly a decade due to so few members.



Above: Date unknown. May be Women's Guild members; photo identifies women L to R as Rose Torre, Anne Henderson.

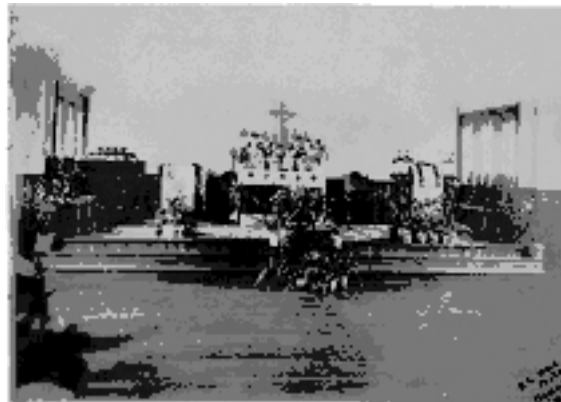


Above: Again, date unknown. May be Women's Guild members; photo identifies Anne Henderson standing in back, left, with Rose Torre kneeling in front of her.

In 1912, the church reorganized with twelve members meeting in the Universalist Church, located at the corner of Dodge and Union Streets, with services conducted by H. Midworth, Missionary In Charge.



Rented Universalist Church, 1912-1920



Inside view of Universalist Church,
First Easter 1912

On February 19, 1912, St. John's was granted Mission status by the Diocese (The Right Rev. Charles D. Williams, Fourth Bishop of Michigan) and a four-person Vestry was appointed (Dr. W. J. Burrows as Warden, and Messrs. A. J. Elliston Torre, W. M. Thomas, and James Barlow). In 1920, the first church building was built on Union Street.



First Church built on Union Street
and occupied 1920-27



Inside Union Street Church 1922; Baptismal Font, Altar
and other items we have in the nave or chapel.

Franklin Gibson succeeded Mr. Midworth and church attendance grew. In 1927, St. John's second church was built at the corner of Maple and Harvey Streets. The Rev. Francis Tetu became the minister in 1942, and by 1944 St. John's was granted Parish status.



Second Church built corner of Maple and Harvey Streets, and occupied 1927-60

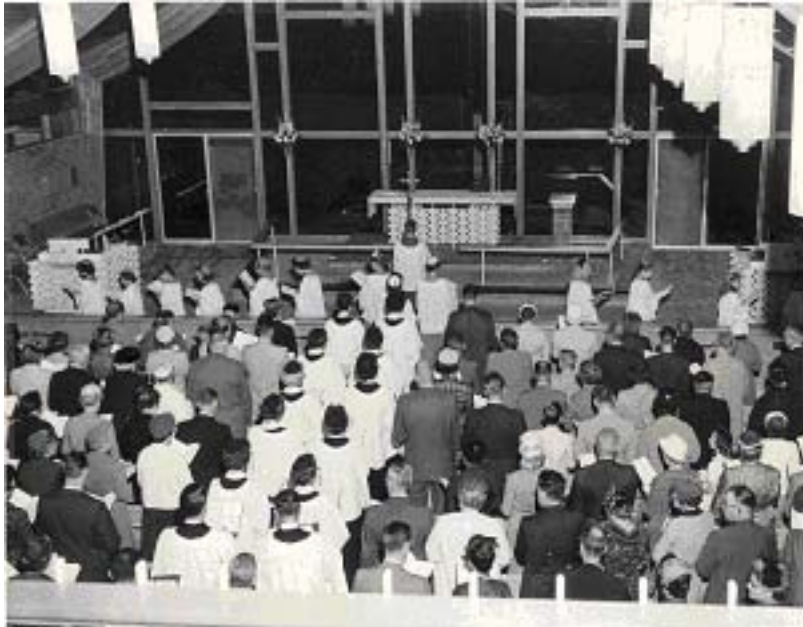


Inside church at 1013 Maple Avenue, West (taken about 1950).

The Rev. Alexander Miller served as Rector of St. John's from 1948-1951. The Rev. Canon David T. Davies served as Rector from 1951-1969 during a time of growth and change. Plans were made to build at the present Sheldon Road site where the rectory was built first in 1952-1953 and ground was broken for the church in 1959, with the first service was held on June 5, 1960.



The current church building at 574 S. Sheldon Road was occupied from 1960 to present. The rectory visible in back built 1952 (converted to current youth house in 2007).



Inside the Sheldon Road church at the September 15, 1960 Dedication

The unique architectural design of St. John's was symbolic of both praying hands and the hull of a ship. The cross was placed outside as a visible symbol of Christ in the community.



The Rev. Robert S. Shank served as rector from 1969-1994 after having served as assistant to Canon Davies from 1966-1969. As the parish grew, new classrooms were added, with Davies Hall and the kitchen enlarged. In the early 1990's the nave was remodeled and the Gathering was added. The Rev. William B. Lupfer served as Rector from 1997-2003. Under his leadership, parish growth continued and St. John's became a program-size church with multiple staff members. In July 2005, The Rev. Dorian L. McGlannan became Rector of St. John's.

St. John's Episcopal Church continues to be a vital part of the Plymouth community, bringing the Gospel message to all.



St. John's Episcopal Church on Sheldon Road (photo 2010).