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History of St. Paul's, Walnut Creek, CA, prepared by Mike Siebert in 2008. Format: Oral presentation to Vestry and New Members, with slide show.

1849 Gold Rush brought lots of people to California.

Good morning, I am Mike Siebert, I have been a member of St. Paul's since 1997, and it is my privilege to talk to you this morning for about 20 minutes about the history of St. Paul's. We are so happy you have decided to become a part of our ongoing history. But first, I want to acknowledge the great debt we owe to Laura Lott, who was our Parish Historian and compiled a very detailed and colorful history in the mid-seventies. Laura retired to the Episcopal home in Santa Rosa and I am informed she passed away a year or two ago.

I also want to thank Pat Smith, who put all these wonderful pictures on powerpoint and who is operating the equipment this morning. I am afraid I am very low tech. The story boards you see in this room also have many photos and I invite you to look at them after our meeting this morning.

October 28, 1849, Trinity Church in San Francisco opened at Powell and Jackson, just a bit down the street from where the Fairmont Hotel is now.

The same year, Grace Chapel opened, near the present site of Grace Cathedral.

And, in 1849, William Slusher built a cabin in what would become Walnut Creek, at the crossings for the Oakland-Stockton and San Jose-Martinez roads. This is currently the intersection of Main and Mt. Diablo, in Walnut Creek.

In 1853, William Ingraham Kip was consecrated the first Missionary Bishop of California-the entire state. He had been the Rector of St. Paul's Church in Albany, New York. He, his wife Maria, and their

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children embarked on an epic journey, which took them by ship to the east coast of Panama, by train part of the way across the isthmus, then by mule train the rest of the way. At one point, the Bishop was reported to have been murdered, but that proved a false report. They then boarded a boat for California. Everything went fine until they encountered a huge storm off San Diego and were shipwrecked and almost drowned. But they survived and sailed into San Francisco Bay on January 29, 1854.

Meanwhile, in Contra Costa County, Episcopalians who wanted to go to church on Sundays had to travel by land to Martinez, then take a boat to St. Paul's Benicia, where Bishop Kip had conducted the first service on October 21, 1854.

In March of 1870, Grace Church Martinez was organized, but that was still a long trip for the folks from the Walnut Creek area.

Five such families were drawn together through their association at Grace Martinez:

—Captain Alfred Harrison, a native of Devonshire, England and his wife Isabella. They moved to Danville in 1887.

—Henry and Maria O'Neill, originally from Pennsylvania, who resided on Charles Hill in Lafayette.

—Dr. Joseph Pearson, from New York, and his wife Sarah, from Lincolnshire, England. In 1887, they moved from Port Chicago to Walnut Creek.

—Mary Thorne, of New York City, and her husband John Thorne of Hyde Park, New York. They settled in the Saranap area of Walnut Creek in 1869.

—Cornelius and Mary Ann Johnson Waite, from England and then Hannibal, Missouri. In 1884 or 1885 they bought land south of Walnut Creek, in the Rudgear area.

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Incidentally, these five families are remembered in the Spiritus Gladeus stained glass window in the chapel.

They agreed to ask the Reverend James Abercrombie, the missionary priest from Grace Church Martinez, to establish a mission in Walnut Creek. He agreed, and the first Episcopal service was conducted in Walnut Creek on August 21, 1887. Some count this as the beginning of St. Paul's, Walnut Creek. Dr. Abercrombie celebrated Walnut Creek's first Holy Communion service on October 9th, 1887.

On December 19, 1887, \$175 was paid for the deed to the property on Locust Street.

Dr. Abercrombie became ill and was not well enough to oversee construction of the church so Bishop Kip assigned that job to The Reverend Hamilton Lee.

In 1888, the Bishop appointed Captain Harrison as St. Paul's first Warden, John Thorne as Clerk and Henry O'Neill as Treasurer.

The fledgling congregation raised \$1600 and ground was broken for construction of the church, now our chapel, in November of 1888. The actual construction work was done by Cornelius Waite and his associates, with Captain Harrison supervising.

Dr. Abercrombie made the trip from Martinez to celebrate the first Holy Communion on Easter, April 21, 1889, and he is forever remembered in the Christ the Good Shepherd stained glass window in the chapel.

At the Diocesan convention in 1889, St. Paul's reported 12 communicants, 6 baptisms, 16 in Sunday School and annual income of \$2014.90.

From 1890 to 1923, priests from the Diocese came to Walnut Creek for services. In those days, Holy Communion was usually celebrated only once a month.

From 1891-1893, St. James, Orinda Park was in operation. This was the first of seven mission churches which sprang from St. Paul's, and six of them still exist.

In 1923, Bishop Parsons appointed Harold S. Morris as Lay Reader in charge of St. Paul's. The number of communicants had risen to 75, and the number of services from 22 to 75.

Some of the Priests in Charge of St. Paul's were: The Rev. Ivan Morgan Merlin Jones, The Rev. Hale Townsend, The Rev. Evan Glandon Davies, The Rev. Harold Sydney Morris, The Rev. Albert Edward Harold Martyr, and The Rev. George Edwin Weagant.

In 1931, The Rev. Frederick C. Miller was assigned as Vicar in Charge of the mission. On September 19, 1937, he made this remark in the Record of Services: "Preached right from the shoulder-I hope I woke them up!" Rev. Miller resigned in dejection in 1938, disappointed at the lack of response to his ministry. Yet, during his tenure, attendance doubled, there was an increase in the number of services and the parish hall was constructed. His illness and the national depression in general may have had something to do with his negative assessment of his efforts.

In 1939, St. Paul's welcomed the Rev. James Trotter as Vicar, and in 1944 St. Paul's became a parish and Fr. Trotter became our first Rector.

In 1941, there were 140 communicants of St. Paul's, Walnut Creek's population was 2300 and the average income was \$1800 per year, about \$150 per month.

Fr. Trotter, a native of Victoria, British Columbia, was a man of great energy and had a fine sense of humor. He and his family resided in a very modest rectory and his wife had some great stories about their life there. Fr. Trotter also conducted early Sunday service in Brentwood.

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In 1945, St. Michael's and All Angels, Concord, mission was organized.

In 1946, Fr. Trotter left St. Paul's to become a missionary in the Philippines.

The Rev. David Graham became Rector in 1946 and served until 1951. It was during his tenure that the decision was made to move the church to its present location and to undertake the project of building a new church. In June, 1947, we paid \$5000 for the lot on Walnut Avenue, now Trinity. Fr. Graham established the practice of rotating our elected vestry, which we still do.

In 1948 our women's auxiliary sponsored movies for children at the old El Rey Theatre on Main Street, and in 1949 we had our first rummage sale, the proceeds were \$148.50.

In June of 1950 we sold the Locust Street property for \$42,000, and in October the Chapel was moved to its present location. The first service on Walnut Avenue (now Trinity) was on October 22, 1950. Attendance: 8AM: 38; 9:30AM:53; 11AM: 87, for a total of 178.

In 1951, the classroom wing was dedicated, St. Stephens, Orinda was organized and The Rev. Wilfred H. Hodgkin was called as St. Paul's third rector.

In 1952, we purchased the land for the parking lot for \$3000.

In 1953, St. Timothy's, Danville was organized and the cornerstone of our new church was dedicated.

In 1954, the new church was consecrated by Bishop Block and St. Paul's Cooperative Nursery School was organized.

1955: Communicants: 816; Baptisms: 121; Total attendance: 38,795; Income: \$36,175.61.

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On April 5, 1957, we increased our fire insurance to \$145,000 and on May 5 the parish hall was destroyed by fire.

In 1959, St. Anselm's, Lafayette, and Church of the Resurrection, Pleasant Hill, were organized.

In 1969, the Altar Guild was instructed to wear head coverings when working at the altar. Total communicants: 941; income: \$63,408.28.

The Rev. Alfred Seccombe, fourth rector of St. Paul's conducted his first holy communion in the Chapel in 1961. Bill Stone, husband of current member Ruth Stone, was appointed organist and choir director. Mrs. Marjorie Schimmel Ivy was appointed our first Parish Secretary, a post which evolved into Parish Administrator and currently occupied by Pat Smith.

In 1962, Lord Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury, visited St. Paul's for a Deanery dinner after participating in an interfaith service at Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church.

1965: Communicants: 828; income: \$80,073.23.

In 1965 our Easter attendance was 1645! St. Luke's Rossmoor was organized.

In 1969, we adopted the following statement of purpose:

“We have one purpose—that every member of St. Paul's be moving into a steadily deepening relationship with Jesus Christ. This movement must take place in two ways: (1) by the individual growth in the Lord of every person in this parish, and (2) by our growth together as a Christian community of love, a family, one body of which Christ is the Head. Neither of these approaches can stand alone. Both of them are essential for each of us and for all of us.”

Also in 1969, our pipe organ was installed.

1970 saw the first session of St. Paul's summer camp on the Eel River, a revered tradition which continues to this day.

1975 saw the opening of the Food Pantry. At the conclusion of the year, we had 510 communicants, and our income was \$106,608.

In 1976, Nancy Burchett became our first woman lay reader.

Fr. Seccombe left St. Paul's in 1977 and in 1978, we called Fr. Stephen McWhorter to be our fifth rector. He served until 1987.

During Fr. McWhorter's leadership, we acquired the buildings next door to the east, currently the Youth Center and the Fellowship House. I am told Fr. McWhorter was charismatic and a dynamic preacher.

In 1987, St. Paul's celebrated its centenary, and had a fabulously successful celebration over four weekends to which we invited all our former rectors and their families. They all attended and spoke. It is our great fortune that all of these sessions were recorded, so we have on tape all of our former rectors, some with marvelous reminiscences and an absolutely show stopping performance by Bob Schroder, possibly St. Paul's senior member, since he was baptized in the chapel when it was on Locust Street. Bob acted as Master of Ceremonies at the Centennial and gave an unforgettable narrative history of Walnut Creek. Here is a photo of all of our rectors taken at that celebration.

Fr. McWhorter left St. Paul's in 1987 and it took two years before Fr. Bob Reynolds was called. Fr. Bob had been Rector of Christ Church, Lake Oswego, Oregon. During Fr. Bob's 17 years at St. Paul's, major renovation of the physical plant took place, as it had become rather run down before his arrival. The capital fund drive in the early '90s replaced the roof on the church, installed air conditioning and expanded and remodeled the administration wing.

In the late 1990's, a major capital fund drive resulted in remodeling the parish hall, new slate floor and lighting in the church, remodeling of the fellowship house, doubling the size of the pipe organ, creation of the glass enclosed narthex, installation of the new baptistry, stained glass windows in the church, remodel of the choir area, and a very generous individual gift enabled us to add the book store and Livingston Conference Room.

Fr. Bob retired in 2006, but we had established our search and transition committees even before he left.

In 2006, the search for our new Bishop, to replace Bishop Swing, who had served for 26 years, culminated when all candidates met at St. Paul's for one of their "walk-about's", and in May, at Grace Cathedral, Bishop Marc Andrus was elected on the third ballot and was installed as the eighth Bishop of California on July 22.

In November of 2006, Katherine Jefforts Schori was installed as the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church.

Shortly thereafter, The Rev. M. Sylvia O. Vasquez joined us to be the seventh Rector of St. Paul's, and on April 15, 2007, Bishop Marc Andrus joined all of us at St. Paul's, with clergy from far and wide, for our Celebration of New Ministry at which Rev. Sylvia was formally installed. Rev. Sylvia came to us from the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, the world's largest cathedral, where she was Canon for Parish Development. Before that, Rev. Sylvia served in San Antonio, and I believe she is a third generation Texan. That explains the cowboy boots which we sometimes see her wearing on high occasions. We are doubly blessed that when Rev. Sylvia agreed to join us, we also got her husband, Bill Ennis, originally from Fresno, who is a wonderful addition to St. Paul's, and has taken on any number of assignments and jobs, and joins us in worship every Sunday.

St. Paul's continues to be a place where good Christian people gather to worship and serve the Lord.

We are privileged to have a wonderful staff to serve us—In addition to Rev. Sylvia, our Rector, we have Fr. Phil Brochard, our Associate Rector, who joined us after his graduation from General Theological Seminary in New York, and who virtually grew up with us here at St. Paul's before he went to seminary. And we have our Deacons, Rev. Don Adolphson and Margaretmary Staller, who has worshipped with us for many years before she became a Deacon. And, of course, Pat Smith, our Parish Administrator, and official photographer par excellence. We are currently searching for a new Director of Music and permanent organist.

Our many, many ministries and activities serve the Congregation and the Community, and we are so happy to have you aboard as new members who will continue our long history here in Walnut Creek.

Mike Siebert  
2008