

Hull's Episcopal Mission navigates its founding year

Hull Episcopal Mission marks its first anniversary next month, looking ahead to building plans.

But at the same time members are reminiscing about an earlier Episcopal mission building that was sent in 1944 by sea from Nantasket Avenue to its new location on the Cape Cod Canal at Buzzards Bay.

The new congregation began in a living room with one family attending. It now includes 24 households, and another five families who come occasionally, said the Rev. Diane Edson of Hingham who is priest in charge.

The anniversary service will be held at 4:30 p.m. Jan. 12 in Hull Pope Memorial United Methodist Church, Hull Village, where she had led worship since September.

While there are Episcopal churches in neighboring Cohasset and Hingham, this is the first in Hull for many years. Because services are in the afternoon, Edson says many how attend have already attended their own church in the morning, or have missed their own service and find communion at that time of day quieting and enriching.

Edson started the congregation as part of a mission project soon after she graduated from Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge. She searched during her senior year for a need she could fill on the South Shore, since her husband, the Rev. Robert Edson, is rector of St. John the Evangelist Church, Hingham.

The new congregation offers an adult inquirers class, child care, and other aspects of larger congregations. And recently, the whole congregation was the choir for an ecumenical carol sing at St. Ann's Catholic Church in Hull.

While the new church has grown to the point where a building of their own will soon be needed, the congregation remembers the chapel that once served summer residents.

The Church of Our Savior was built in 1906 at the corner of N Street and Nantasket Avenue on the ocean side of Allerton. Sponsors were St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Cohasset, and St. John's Church, Hingham.

"There was also evidence that land had been given for a small rectory," Edson said. "But it was decided instead of building a rectory, that it was important to have as the priest, a young, unmarried clergyman who could stay in people's homes and get to know them. It is not clear from the correspondence where the land is and who owns it now."

There as a some talk, by the last 1930s, of keep the chapel open in the winter, but the population just couldn't support it, and finally couldn't support it in summer either, Edson said. At one time there was a question of its becoming a community church, rather than Episcopal. But later the building was abandoned and boarded up.

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In 1944, the Rev. Samuel Stephenson, new priest at an Episcopal mission in Buzzards Bay on the Cape Cod Canal, began to search for a church building for his growing congregation.

When he heard about the unused church in Hull, 45 miles north of Cape Cod, he arranged to have the building loaded onto a barge and towed by a tug, *Bounty*, 60 miles across Cape Cod Bay and up the canal.

The diocesan magazine, *The Church Militant*, in July 1947, reported that the Allerton worshipers who had been members of the church from its consecration, gathered at Hull Beach with the sacred vessels of communion that had been used for 50 years, and their altar linens.

In Buzzards Bay, “thousands of cheering people lined both sides of the canal on that late spring morning to see ‘the little church that came in on the tide,’” according to the *Militant*.

A Bourne woman told the church magazine that she had seen men retired for age and thought to be beyond further usefulness, brought back to useful service, “and here was a church, closed and boarded up, its service apparently over, riding gallantly into the sight of cheering thousands to its new sphere of usefulness.”

“I just cried when I saw the church riding so grandly up the Cape Cod Canal,” she said.

“News spread rapidly that Tuesday morning: the church was riding the high tide; had passed under the Bourne Bridge and would dock at two.”

“One man chartered a plane. *Life Magazine* and *Pathe News* had planes as well as cameramen on land. Bell operators were swamped.”

Businesses at Buzzards Bay, Bourne and Sandwich closed down, and cars came by the thousands from Wareham and from the Cape.

The journey of the church, now called St. Peter's Church on the Canal, is described with a picture showing townspeople pulling the church onto the land.

“It seems nobody had obtained the official permit to pull the building onto the shore, so Stephenson decided to have lunch,” Edson said. “When he came back the building was on shore.”

From all over the country came gifts. “A man serving a life sentence mailed a dollar. Another man, bedridden for 12 years, sent a dollar and followed it by another.”

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"Philadelphia, Miami, El Paso, Detroit newspapers carried pictures of the church in transit and the dollars (kept) coming in."

It was the beginning of a new church in Buzzards Bay, but most Hull Episcopalians from that point on went to church in Hingham or Cohasset.

Edson has pieced together the story of the move from correspondence between the pastors, the Rev. George Francis Weld of Hingham and the Rev. Milo Gates of Cohasset. But she would like to hear from people who remember the building in Hull or who may have been baptized in that church.

The Rev. Edson Outwin of New York, a priest at the original chapel and later a member of the parish development committee for the Massachusetts Episcopal Diocese, told Edson that much of the correspondence and historical material is stored with the church in Buzzards Bay.

To raise funds for the new Hull church, Edson is preparing a portable exhibit of the former Church of Our Savior. "We now have to broaden the base of our financial support," she said. "Several churches have already expressed interest in seeing it and hearing about it."

In this way, the original chapel can be a part of the new congregation.

The Church of our Savior was located barely a block from the storefront on Nantasket Avenue where Edson opened Wellspring, the Hull Interfaith Thrift Shop and Fellowship Center, as another part of her mission.

While it was started with Episcopal Church funds, Edson said Wellspring has taken on an ecumenical flavor and will soon be self-supporting. Hingham Congregational Church and Faith Nazarene Church, Hingham, contribute used clothing from their thrift shops to Wellspring, and last month the Hingham-Hull Interfaith Clergy Association made Wellspring the beneficiary of the offering at the annual ecumenical community Thanksgiving service in Old Ship Unitarian Church.

Recently the Catholic Social Service Committee of Hull asked to use Wellspring as a distribution point for their new food pantry. Edson said food distribution will begin in February.

The Buzzards Bay congregation has also had a thrift shop and fellowship center next to St. Peter's Church, the old Church of Our Savior, for many years.

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