

## St. Margaret's Story

When one of says, "I'm a member of St. Margaret's Church," or "I go to St. Margaret's," our eyes get a little brighter and our voices and faces lift. The person to whom we are speaking can tell by our expression, the "going to St. Margaret's" is something special, that something special happens among the people there. It is that *specialness* which makes St. Margaret's story on which we want to tell and that we want others to hear. We are important parts of that story. We are also co-authors with God in the way that story will be told in the future.

Our story does not begin in 1972 at Vince's Restaurant or in 1789 when the Episcopal Church was formed from the Church of England or during the reign of Henry VIII when the Church in England became the Church of England. It doesn't even begin with "Once upon a time". Rather, our story starts this way: "In the beginning, God...". It is only because we are a people called by God to make his image present in a weary, sinful, and aching world that we have a story. Ours is the story of Christ and all the stories of his people. For we are *fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*, as scripture says, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." When we forget why our story is being written, our eyes lose their sparkle, the music leaves our voices, and people can't tell there's something *special* about St. Margaret's.

All this and much more lies behind the gathering of twelve people on March 19, 1972, at Vince's Bar and Restaurant at Staring and Highland. By December 31, 1973, the group had doubled and committed themselves to our present and future as they signed the charter which officially made St. Margaret's congregation of the Episcopal Church. And by the grace of God, St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland, was chosen for our patron saint – and not Vincent, as gracious as our host was! The Bishop's Mission bought the present site and on August 25, 1974, the first services were held in the temporary classroom building bought from the Board of Education. John G. Allen, Jr., Rector of St. Francis, Denham Springs, was priest-in-charge from the very beginning of St. Margaret's. Now the congregation began to grow. Those were days of hard work in a close-knit and supportive church family.

By January of 1977, there were 45 communicants who, as families and individuals, made 21 pledges totaling \$12,669. The Diocese expressed hope in our future by designating the Bishop's Mission Fund a second time to St. Margaret's, this time for the first permanent structure. On May 15, 1977, Bishop Brown broke ground for the building we are now. That same year John Allen became fulltime Vicar of St. Margaret's. The church was blessed in those days, as now, with many active and hardworking people. St. Margaret's was no chapel of ease for one to hide in. True to the stewardship of real pioneers, nearly everything was the product of the people's own hands. When the building was dedicated on January 15, 1978, churches from all over the diocese contributed items of worship, hymnals, and even large gifts of money for furnishings. Our Memorial Book attempts to record these, but there were so many gifts that we know our list of donors is incomplete.

As a congregation we were moving from infancy to childhood. More often than not, church matters were taken care of over a cup of coffee in someone else's kitchen, or while mowing the lawn. Crawfish boils and work parties were occasions of fun and community building. What St. Margaret's lacked in size, it made up for in the pastoral care of members for each other. If you played hooky from church, everybody knew it! But they also knew if there was sickness in your family – and they responded!

In July of 1978, Father Allen accepted a call to another diocese and David Powers accepted our call to be Vicar of St. Margaret's. The tradition of crawfish boils continued and in the spring and fall, Recreation Sundays were times of "outdoor church," games, picnics, and family get-togethers. Our reputation as a young, vibrant and caring church continued locally and in the diocese. For two years, we were able to produce Arts and Crafts fairs. These not only helped pay off a high-interest rate commercial loan, but also let Baton Rouge know who and where we were.

By 1982, our "new" building was bulging at the seams. You couldn't raise a cup of coffee without having someone else's elbow in it! Once again the Diocese expressed its hope in our future by loaning us over \$32,000 from the John Long Jackson Fund for missions. With the talent and hard labor of our gifted members we were able to add a kitchen, two classrooms, two restrooms, and additional parking. That same year, the Vestry could envision the time that we would no longer live off the faith of others, but enable others to live off our faith. A three-year plan toward financial self-support while making a substantial contribution to the work of the Diocese was undertaken. Through the dedication of time, talent, and treasure of our members and the telling of our story with others, by God's grace we arrived at that point envisioned less than three years before. While it might be said that we were in adolescence as a congregation, our development was rapid those two years. Our story attempts to be true to our calling to proclaim God's love. Each of us had a role to play.

St. Margaret's became so active that even the devil was hard pressed to find a pair of idle hands. Building and ground maintenance was entered into as a community project. Those blessed with green thumbs provided TLC to flower beds, hanging plants and flower boxes. Cleaning crews regularly cleaned the entire facilities to save money that would ordinarily go for janitorial services. If someone was sick and we knew about it, we responded. Eighteen people were directly involved in teaching. That same number was involved in the Edge of Adventure classes on Thursday evenings. We had 39 people attend Cursillo and six high school students attend Happening. More and more of us were serving in staff positions. EYC and JYC became active in local, Deanery and Diocesan activities - and then there was Camp Hardtner! EYC raised its own funds by washing cars, putting on pancake suppers, and pure old hard labor. They also tithed to the church of all their income. ECW supported many charitable works through the fashion show luncheon, white elephant, bake sales and other projects. These were the people who saw to it that our hospitality was second-to-none. Our beautiful Apostles' chalice and paten was their gift. Many of them also did the very striking vestments seen in the various seasons. The season of Advent brought offerings of talent to God's glory! One summer, they even sponsored an ice cream social with a real live clown and minstrels – not to mention about eight flavors of delicious

homemade ice cream! ECW shared its talents for needs outside St. Margaret's as well. Sunday evening meals were regularly provided for students at St. Alban's Chapel on the LSU campus.

Our growth as a church community also enabled us to respond to the needs of the community at large. St. Margaret's Cupboard collected food for distribution to various agencies and families, such as the Battered Women's Shelter, Hosannah House for unwed mothers, and people who call for help. One year, 40 dolls were dressed for the Salvation Army Christmas project. Several were First Place winners for all of Baton Rouge!

Our Evangelism Committee issued the invitation of "Bring-A-Friend" Sunday in which an instructed Eucharist helped deepen the understanding of our worship. Some of the members launched a Prison Ministry, writing letters to inmates and committing themselves to the Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree project for gifts for inmates' families. But, we also "reached out" by inviting community groups in. Boy Scout Troop 505, chartered in 1978, became one of the best in the Istrouma Council, with a high rate of Eagle Scouts. They shared in our work, too, by painting our buildings, making bulletin boards, and even donating our two flags. Our facilities were used by various other Boy Scout and Girl Scout groups for meetings. Civic associations and Weight-Watchers also met here.

One summer, Grace Lutheran shared with us in Vacation Church School and more than 150 adults and children shared in the closing services of this well-received ecumenical venture. But the greatest ministry not only involved Lutheran neighbors, it also included the clergy from University Presbyterian, St. John's Methodist, and University Methodist Churches. This was in addition to our very dedicated lay people. Of course, our story would not be nearly true to the mind of Christ and the good Queen of Scotland herself without our Nursing Home Ministry. Developed by Pat Lyle, and now shared by many, this is where we are having the most impact in a great area of need. Christ said, "I came not to be served, but to be a servant to many." If you want to see eyes really shine, ask one of the people who spend Mondays and other times at nursing homes in this ministry. Because of the importance of care and the Church's need to service, Pat is now a Deacon. Her call to this ministry and our support as a congregation are essential for God's work to be done here.

By the summer of 1986, we had grown to 170 communicants. That was also a summer of change, for in late July, Father Powers announced that he accepted a call to be rector of St. Matthews in Houma. After nearly a one-year interim, the Rev. Ronald Whitmer became the third full-time pastor of St. Margaret's. The following year brought a bit of a decline to the parish, reflecting the trends in the greater Baton Rouge economy.

In the fall of 1990, Fr. Whitmer resigned to pursue a non-parochial ministry here in Baton Rouge. On August 1, 1991, the Rev. Daniel H. Martins began his ministry at St. Margaret's. With an enviable location near a major crossroads in growing part of town, our future appeared bright.

In the summer of 1994, Fr. Martins accepted a call to St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church in Stockton, California. St. Margaret's was without a rector for approximately six months. On April 30, 1995, we celebrated the installation of our present vicar, the Rev. J. Victor Sheldon.

There are many roles to play in our story – but none of them are “bit parts” or “walk-ons”. Each is important for the building up the Body of Christ. Acolytes, altar guild, choristers and musicians, lectors and lay readers, ushers, hosts, teachers, grass cutters, floor moppers all give praise to God in service. In that praise, God's word is done and his love proclaimed. We are stewards of God's bounty – called to develop that bounty to even greater acts of love and service.

And so, our story is one joined with those of all ages which is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. How marvelous it is to play a part in that story – and to share it with others! Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

High on a hill in Edinburgh, Scotland is Edinburgh Castle, a city itself. At the very top is St. Margaret's Chapel - the oldest part of the Castle. It isn't very big, but it is big enough to receive Margaret and her family at prayer. Those prayers became the light of Scotland, and Margaret has become our patron saint. If we, like her, member the source of all we have, then that sparkle in our eyes and the lift to our voices and faces will continue.

***Great things are they that you have done, O Lord my God! How great your wonders and your plans for us! There is none who can be compared with you.***

