

ST. LUKE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The first Episcopal services in Perinton were probably held in 1828 or 1829 by the Rev. Ezekiel Gear from West Avon, and there is mention of sporadic services being held in the 1860's. By 1886, a small congregation of about forty-five people had leased the former Universalist Church on East Church Street, organized a choir, a Ladies' Aid Society, a Sunday School, and was holding regular services. The Rev. George Thomas LeBouillier, who came from Pittsford on a railroad handcart (which had been lent to him by the railroad),



East Church Street St. Luke's Church

celebrated the first of those regular services on Sunday morning, September 12, 1886.

In 1887, for \$2300, the group purchased the land and building that they had been leasing and incorporated themselves as St. Luke's Episcopal Church. The first vestry members were Theron Pritchard, John Robinson, C.L. Dunbar, B.L. Thompson, R.M. Swift, and A.G. Odell. The church was furnished with an altar and lectern built by Henry Suter and given by Mrs. Swift's Sunday school class and the Sunday school of Christ Church, Pittsford, respectively. Otherwise the interior furnishings were sparse, lacking carpets or any means of heating. Although congregations numbered more than 100 in the early days, by 1897 records list only twenty communicants. In 1907, Bishop Walker described the Fairport church as "moribund"; however, since the Fairport community was growing rapidly, the pastor at the time, Archdeacon William Davis, was not willing to give up. He is quoted in a history of the diocese as saying: "Last fall I decided that the best thing to do was to take down the old building and from the debris erect, as far as possible, a new one on more churchly lines. When I announced my purpose to the people, it was received with incredulous looks. They had been dead so long and were so happy in their grave clothes, that they resented even the thought of a resurrection . . . When I started out with a subscription paper, one man offered me fifty cents. In two days, I had a little over one hundred dollars subscribed and one dollar paid in. With this small financial backing, I sent for two carpenters who had worked for me before, and much to the consternation of the people, we began the work of tearing down. Each week I collected the money to pay the men, and by the last of the month, we had, from the old materials, reconstructed and enclosed what promises to be a neat Gothic building, at an expenditure of a little over \$400. We need about \$400 more to complete the structure . . . I am my own architect, and, as occasion may require, my own builder . . . The people of the town have already had a vision of a man in clerical garb upon the roof of the church laying shingles." Apparently, Fr. Davis inspired the small congregation, because by 1924 the mortgage was paid off, and the church had received a number of memorial gifts, including a baptismal font, given in 1907, which is still in use. In 1927, under the leadership of the Rev. Ridgley Lytle, a parish house addition was built which contained a kitchen, an assembly hall, and a heating plant for both the parish hall and the church. The parish declined during the years of the Depression. In 1936, for example, there were only 25 pledges. The congregation held services in the parish hall because they lacked money to repair the furnace that heated the church itself, and there was a stove in the parish hall. The church, however, managed to survive and begin to grow again. Women were given voting rights in parish elections, and as a result of post World War II growth, a house on West Church Street was purchased for the rectory, and, in 1952, St. Luke's became a self-sustaining parish under the leadership of the Rev. Elwyn Brown.

By 1955, St. Luke's had grown to about 200 households and there was talk of building a new and larger church. One plan proposed building a central church for the communities of Perinton, Penfield, and East Rochester; however, a survey indicated that the majority of church members were opposed. Subsequently, the Church of the Incarnation was established in Penfield and St. Luke's plans for expansion were tabled.

The decade of the 1960's was a tumultuous one for the Church. In 1962, under the leadership of its rector, the Reverend Dustin Ordway, the parish sold the village property to the Fairport Public Library (who subsequently sold it to the village as the site for the fire hall), and purchased sixteen acres of land on a hill off Ayrault Road on what would become Country Corner Lane in the Brambleridge East subdivision. With the growth in Perinton, the church would now have a more central location in the town. As a result of several bequests, St. Luke's already had about \$91,000 in a capital fund. The proposed new church, designed by noted architect Marcel Breuer, was to be a large, modern, concrete structure. Mr. Breuer declined to work within a budget, and the proposed cost of his plan came to well over \$400,000. Issues surrounding the building plans caused significant dissension within the congregation, and eventually the plan was discarded, primarily due to lack of sufficient funding. A smaller, prefabricated structure was built and opened in 1968 with the hope that it would eventually become a parish hall when and if the Breuer design was ever built. Despite the fact that the town population was growing in the late 60's and early 70's, St. Luke's did not see significant expansion, perhaps due to the social stresses of that period, changes in the prayer book, issues like the ordination of women, and disagreements over the role the church should play in commenting on social, political, or national issues.

During the 1980's, however, the parish enjoyed significant growth which led to a space crunch in the small church building, and some minor remodeling was done to expand the space. At the same time, several generous gifts made it possible to purchase a pipe organ to enhance St. Luke's tradition of excellent music. The congregation has been fortunate in its music directors, which have included two American Guild of Organists national competition winners.

Space problems continued to plague St. Luke's throughout the 1980's, and in 1988, when the Reverend Hugh Stevenson was rector, a "Second Century Fund" was established to raise money for a new church building. This time the building project was successful and a more traditional stone building was erected and dedicated in 1990. In addition to a larger worship space, the building includes meeting rooms and Sunday School rooms as well as a columbarium, a room that houses niches for ashes.

Today, St. Luke's, under the guidance of the Rev. Deven Hubert, describes itself as "an open, Christ-centered community, caring for each other, and doing God's work in the world." In addition to church school, adult education, youth programs, and social events, the parish also has an active outreach program that supports a number of local organizations, including Advent House, Perinton Clergy-Lay Council, Fairport Community Vacation Bible School, a Meal and More, and Safe Journey. Parishioners are also involved in tutoring programs at several Rochester city elementary schools. And St. Luke's Hill Nursery School has met at the church for over 30 years. Together with the family of Rochester Episcopal Bishop Prince Singh, the congregation is currently working to develop a relationship with a Dalit congregation in India.

St. Luke's remains committed to fulfilling its goal of "doing God's work in the world" as the twenty-first century moves forward.

