

In the late 1940's May Harris went door to door on Anna Maria Island, seeking Episcopalians who would support a new church if it were to be started on the island. The Bishop had told her he would support her request if she could find enough would-be Episcopalians. Sadly, she couldn't find enough interested people. This didn't discourage her, however; and five years later she was knocking on doors again. In the church archives, we still have May Harris's notebook with 79 signatures in it. This time she was successful. The island population had grown, and on March 31, 1952, a small group of islanders wrote to the bishop, the Rt. Rev. Henry Louttit, stating that "more than sixty adult baptized persons living at Anna Maria Beach wish to form a mission."

We the undersigned, humbly present ourselves through this petition to seek your blessing and permission to establish a Mission on the island of Anna Maria, Florida, to provide for Catholic worship and discipline and to provide the teaching of Catholic doctrine as can be plainly found in Anglican history and custom, as presented by the Book of Common Prayer; and to accept the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, which we most earnestly believe to be a true portion of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church of history and the creeds, founded by our Lord Jesus Christ and continued under God, unto this day and place.

The letter was signed by Richard I. Brown and Herman E. Turner. A group of 35 met for the first Episcopal service of Evensong at the home of George and May Harris on Saturday, May 4, 1952 with the Rev. Burkett Kniveton officiating. When the diocese granted mission status, Father Kniveton was appointed the first vicar. The parish was sharing Fr. Kniveton with a church in Venice at first. Fr. Kniveton would come on Sunday mornings one week and Sunday evenings on the alternate weeks. "It was so hot in the evenings and the mosquitoes were more than plentiful," remembers one early member.

A week later, they met at the Lion Club's Youth Center building for Eucharist. Father Kniveton came from Venice to officiate. This time there were 60 present.

Bishop Louttit came to the island on June 29, 1952. The Bishop convened a meeting to select a vestry who were to serve until the annual meeting. Unanimously elected were George Harris Sr., William K. Hathaway, A.H. Robson, Bouvard Shell, Charles C. Castle, and John W. Ottley. He then charged the people to name their new mission. "And don't let it be anything by the sea," he said. "We already have enough of them." Voting was as follows:

Church of the Annunciation 13 votes
Church of our Lady, Star of the Sea, 3 votes
Church of St. Celements, 3 votes.

The Bishop pronounced that the mission would be Church of the Annunciation. Bishop Louttit explained that the Senior Warden is chosen by the vicar; the other officers are chosen by the vestry members. Chosen were: George L. Harris, Senior Warden; A.H. Robson, Junior Warden; and John W. Ottley, secretary. The Bishop appointed Mrs. May Harris to be treasurer. The

bishop also told those in attendance that if they still held membership “back home” they could not participate in any voting or business dealings, but did not forbid them from the work crew.

The new vestry agreed to pay \$25 per month toward Father Kniveton’s stipend, and four cents a mile for his travel expense. The bishop informed them that when they could pay \$1500 toward the stipend and furnish living quarters for the vicar’s family, they would have a good chance at hiring a full time priest. It was also suggested that the mission should have half of the cost of a new building in hand before considering erecting a structure to serve as the church.

Services were first held each Sunday in “the old school building,” now known as the Anna Maria Island Community Center, from May until October. The congregation numbered about 50, with 27 children attending catechism classes. “It was so cold there,” remembered Mrs. Arthur Johnson. “During the week we collected driftwood on the beach and stored it in the trunk of the car until Sunday.” Mrs. George Harris provided rolls and coffee after the service. Mrs. Robson had charge of fixing an altar and taking care of the linens. The altar was 2 saw-horses and a piece of plywood. Mr. Robson and Mr. Hathaway were the work team who swept out before the service, placed the chairs, and carried in the portable organ.

When Father Kniveton and Mrs. Kniveton came to live on the island, they created a small chapel in the garage below the apartment where they lived. This was located in the area that is now a parking area for the Sandbar Restaurant. Kneeling benches and pews were built, and the vestry purchased a used organ for \$75. The “holy garage” could accommodate about 20 people and was dedicated to Saint Michael, and known as St. Michael’s Oratory. They used the “holy garage” from October, 1952 until September, 1953. When Bishop Louttit first saw it, he was astounded and gave a loud whistle. The seating accommodations were later transferred to the church when it was first built.

At a vestry meeting in October, 1952, Fr. Kniveton read a letter from “a near-by parish” with complaints that communicants of the new mission were accused of trying to persuade communicants of that parish to withdraw and transfer to the new mission. The Bishop said he was “unwilling to ask money from parishes if he had to spend this money for a priest who was trying to wreck a parish.” The new priests seem to have worked out their difficulties, as the issue is never mentioned again.

Pledge income for the year was \$2,861, and the loose offering was estimated at \$500 a year. With this in mind, the vestry agreed that they had enough income to request the full time services of Fr. Burket Kniveton.

Mr. George Harris called the small congregation to attend a potluck supper in January 1953 to talk about creating a church building. Mrs. Emily Carleton had offered them one 100’ x 100’ lot and the opportunity to buy two adjoining lots of the same size for \$1500. Harris, John Ottley,

and Mr. Troutman signed a personal note at the First National Bank to buy the lots. The vestry agreed that 5% of the gross income of the church would be used to repay this note. They purchased two lots between Gulf Drive and Second Avenue. (This is the area where the church and front parking area is today).

Bishop Louttit made his first Episcopal visitation to St Michael's Oratory on June 21, 1953, at which time he confirmed fourteen candidates before a congregation of 80 people. Junior Warden Al Robson presented a preliminary sketch of the planned church, but a discussion with the women of the parish about the kitchen and Sunday School rooms in the proposed new building raised the cost estimate to the point where it was feared "they could not expect to build in the near future."

In December they had the lot surveyed and set concrete markers at the corners. At the Annual Meeting in January, it was decided that they should construct one building with living quarters for the priest and his family and a parish hall with kitchen. The parish hall could be used for services, Sunday School, and meetings. The building fund had a balance of \$2,914. Elected to the vestry were Colonel Chapman, Bernard McElwee, George Price, and Bouvard Shell. It was announced that the diocesan assessment would be \$70 for the year.

George Price suggested to the membership to try the "Piggy Bank at meals" method of raising money. A bank would be kept on the table, and each person at each meal dropped in a penny. Once a month the banks were brought into the church and given to the treasurer. They later called these the *pence cans* which typically generated \$55-80 a month. They continued this practice for many years.

With just about \$7,000 in hand or pledged, the First National Bank of Bradenton agreed to a loan of \$15,000, secured by the signatures of three individuals: Mrs. Emily Carleton, Mr. W.H. Troutman, and Mr. George Harris Sr. After lengthy discussion, it was decided that the vestry would act as general contractor, using George Harris Jr. as the builder.

Ground was broken for a new church building on April 19, 1953 with 125 people in attendance. Construction continued through the summer. The new building was dedicated on September 14, 1953, in ceremonies conducted by the Rt. Rev. Martin J. Bramm, Suffragen Bishop of the Diocese of South Florida. D. Alan Tripp was the first child baptized in the new church.

Almost every ornament and furnishing of the church was provided as a memorial gift including the altar, stained glass windows, the font, the organ, brass candlesticks, processional cross, and the front doors (on Second Avenue) "which are always open." The reredos and original baptistery ornaments, the altar rail, and kneeler, the lectern, pulpit, credence table, and the tabernacle were all made by Mr. Herbert Crookes of Anna Maria, a member of the parish. The Stations of the Cross were given by Mrs. George Price. The statue of St. Francis in the garden was given by the Robson family. The altar linens were made by Mrs. Troutman. The Christos Rex was made by P.A.M. Stewart in 1960.

At the vestry meeting in October, 1953 the treasurer announced that they had spent \$22,163.88 on the new church building and had just \$1,383 left in the building fund, with just over \$3,500 in outstanding bills. What to do about a shortfall of \$2,124? By shifting some funds around and moving money from the general fund, they got the deficit down to \$814. It was decided to pay a portion of each outstanding bill, assuring their vendors that they would pay in full as soon as possible.

In December, 1953 finances were still in dire shape. With outstanding debts to various sub-contractors, Senior Warden, George Harris was authorized to borrow money from various parishioners, giving each a promissory note.

Even the following April, money was scarce. Treasurer May Harris told the vestry that if she made her regular 5% of income payment to Mrs. Carleton for their land, it would deplete all her funds. The vestry voted to reduce the amount to 3.5% temporarily.

In May, 1954, Father Gurney of the Board of Missions of the Diocese told the vestry that mission parishes all over the state had the same problem: they had not planned sufficiently for the rapid growth of south Florida. He urged them strongly to secure additional space adjacent to the present building, to be prepared for the future. The vestry investigated all available property near or adjacent to the church. The price on available lots was \$4,500, and improved lots were around \$12,000 or more. The vestry responded by voting to seek incorporation immediately and to petition the Standing Committee to obtain permission to mortgage their property.

The Church created a charter forming a non-profit corporation on May 12, 1954. Those signing it were George Harris Sr., William Hathaway, John W. Ottley, Hilding Russell, W.R. Kermode, Frederic Ball, Arthur Johnson, Hiram Phair, and Vicar in Charge, Burket Kniveton.

In June, 1954 the debt on the building was still \$13,600 (of the original \$15,000). A "fine church bell" was given to the parish by the Atlantic Coast Line railroad, thanks to the negotiating skill of E. C. Kavanaugh. The bell was hung in the back area of the church yard, where the Memorial garden is today. The new bell tower with cross on top was in place in time for the annual meeting of the diocesan laymen at Annunciation. This is a very big event for the tiny mission, a first chance to really show off their new structure.

In May of 1955, Mrs. May Harris, the real founder of the parish, resigned as treasurer because of her health. She had held this position since the very first day. Her husband too stepped down as Senior Warden. Colonel Frederic Ball was appointed the second senior warden. The vestry approved an annual budget of \$4,963. Finances were still very shaky. They still owed Mrs. Carleton for the two lots, and they had a bank loan of just under \$11,000.

The church was growing. Average attendance in the Sunday School was 55 students. With 6 teachers, Fr. Kniveton hoped to get 4 more teachers for the growing classes. It is noted that the "large electric refrigerator must be disconnected during the service because of the annoying and

loud noise.” Also, the fan on the gas heater must be disconnected during services because of a vibrating noise.

Picture the building as it was at this time. The church faced second Avenue (not Gulf Drive as it does today), and the main entrance is the red door there. The rectory is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of what is today the kitchen. It connects to what is today the sacristy, and the rector’s office is in the south corner of today’s sacristy. The church hall is less than half the current length, and there is no office wing and no classroom area. In the church, the choir and organ are in the front, and there are no stained glass windows. The interior and exterior of the building is unpainted cement block. There is no parking on the Gulf Drive side—that area is grass close to the building, and heavy vegetation and trees from there to Gulf Drive. The bell is erected high up on two telephone poles, with a cross on top. The lot where today’s rear parking area is located is home to some rental beach cabins, and there is a 2 story house facing Gulf Drive.

In February, 1955, Harold Stevens, a “communicant of the church from up north” and a professional painter, offered to paint the exterior of the church if the vestry will supply the paint. Mr. and Mrs. Hilding Russell donated a lovely set of Stations of the Cross, probably the ones hanging in the church today.

In August of 1955, the vestry voted to refinance their debts—the \$12,500 bank note and the money still owed to Mrs. Carleton for the land. They wanted to change the loans from personal backed debts to a mortgage on their property. The diocese agreed that they could indebted the real estate for a total not to exceed \$12,000. The vestry secured a mortgage of \$10,000 for ten years, of which \$5,000 will bear interest at a rate of 4%.

At the annual meeting of January, 1956, Father Kniveton announced his resignation to do missionary work in the Bahamas. At this time, the mission now had 155 baptized persons, 118 communicants, and 98 registered communicant members. They were expecting 20 people to transfer into the parish in the coming year. Income for the year has been \$6,139, and expenses were \$5,828.

The Rev. Gerald Lowe

The Rev. Gerald Kenneth Lowe was appointed vicar by Bishop Louttit on March 4, 1956. Rev. Lowe was ordained in 1933 and served for ten years as Dean of Christ Church Cathedral in the Falkland Islands. He served for ten years in the Diocese of Albany, followed by 2 years at St. John’s Church in Brooksville, Florida. Fr. Lowe brought his wife Marjorie and children Audrey, Robin, Geraldine, and Angelica. Born after he arrived on the island was his son David.

128 people were present for Fr. Lowe’s first Sunday. Services were a Low Mass at 8 am, Catechism class at 9:30, followed by Morning Prayer at 11 am. Father Lowe established a crypt, built by Captain Stiles Hochstettler, inside the altar, where ashes of members could be kept.

At the Annual Meeting in January, 1959, Fr. Lowe addressed the parish about the desperate need for more space. His family with four children was living in the tiny vicarage, a portion of today's kitchen, and space was needed for Sunday School and meetings. His suggestion was to remodel the present vicarage space and build a new vicarage at the north end of the building. By February the vestry had obtained a loan of \$20,000 from the First Federal Savings and Loan for 20 years at 6%. They also applied to the diocese for a loan of \$10,000.

The vestry again acted as contractor for the new vicarage and George Harris Jr. was the working foreman for the new vicarage. Vestry member Bernard Crookes built a new pulpit, lectern, prayer desk, credence table, hymn board, and gate for the Communion rail. It is noted that in the near future city water will become available, and it will have to be connected to the kitchen and vicarage.

Parish Status

On October 18, 1959, the new vicarage is dedicated with a service of Evensong, followed by a potluck supper. Less than a year later, by action of the diocesan convention in May, 1962, Annunciation Mission is declared a parish. Fr. Lowe was the first rector. The diocese declared that the parish must now pay the rector's full salary of \$4,500. Attendance for the little parish was growing from 100 in 1956 to 160 on Easter of 1960 to 207 on Easter of 1964.

During Father Lowe's ministry at Annunciation, the church saw great growth and had a flourishing Sunday school. In 1962 a parish hall was added. But rapid growth isn't easy, and in February, 1963, the treasurer informed the vestry that the balance in the church's account was not sufficient to meet current expenses. They had to increase their loan, and then were further relieved of financial problems by a significant bequest from the estate of Martha Hall.

The vestry approved combining all the church's indebtedness into one loan in November, 1963, with the First National Bank of Bradenton of \$30,000 for 15 years at 5%.

The church had new pews, pew cushions, and carpet, as well as a new tile floor in 1968. An historical first was the election of Mrs. May Harris as the first woman vestryman. Yes this is the same May Harris who went door to door, seeking out Episcopalians in order to start a church. The little church now has 214 communicants (far more than we have today).

Financial troubles weren't over however. In October, 1968 the treasurer reported just \$146 in his checkbook, with \$71 in bills awaiting payment, and the parish is \$1016 behind in payment of their diocesan assessment. There are fewer than 60 pledges for just under \$14,000.

"We have been in better shape," said Fr. Lower at the Annual Meeting of January, 1969. They owe the bank \$1000, plus the mortgage of \$23,603. The roof has been leaking for months and several small repairs have been made, but they now must replace the whole roof, excepting the rectory. They will borrow \$3,000 from the Island Bank at 7%.

In June, 1970 there is a philosophical discussion taking place. Some are seeking accelerated reduction of the church's indebtedness, while others feel that any extra funds should be used for greater outreach. The thinking here is that the interest is low, and the debt will be repaid long before the end of the useful life of the facilities which will benefit future generations.

By action of the diocesan convention, the parish must pay health insurance (\$254 a year) and life insurance (\$92/year) for the rector for the first time in 1971. Membership is up to 252 communicants.

In March, 1972, the Harrison house abutting the church on the southeast side is for sale at \$26,000. Owning this property would complete the square of church owned property. Since there is no need for the property now; it could be rented for up to \$1200/year. By the time the vestry finished discussing the pros and cons of purchase, the house was no longer on the market. Two years later when it came on the market again, the price was \$37,000.

In May, the vestry voted to provide air-conditioning for the upstairs living area and one bedroom of the rectory. They also approved revamping the front entrance (on Second Street) of the church using the Babcock Memorial Fund, eliminating two four-inch steps. The E.C.W. paid for air conditioning the parish hall. So many times in the church's history it has been the women's group that provided the funds for church improvements and enhancements.

By September, 1973, Father Lowe remarks at the annual meeting that "due to the almost non-existence of children in the parish, the church school cannot grow or progress." The island has changed. No longer an inexpensive place for young families to live, Anna Maria has become a resort community with retirees and renters.

In January, 1974, Father Lowe completed his 18th year as rector. "There are no children in the congregation and hence no Sunday School," he told the Annual Meeting. Among accomplishments for the year he listed the improved vestibule, painting the exterior of the church, a garden repository for cremated remains, painting the interior of the church, parish hall, and washrooms, installation of an amplification system, and great improvements to the garden area.

In January 1975, Father reported to the Annual Meeting that Annunciation had 352 communicants, about 150 households. About 20 of these give regularly but will not pledge. All but 27 of the remaining families have pledged for a total of \$21,750. Father Lowe has made 560 home visits this year and conducted 121 services. This was his last Annual Meeting. Father Lowe will retire in January, 1976. Father and Mrs. Lowe received permission from the vestry to move out of the rectory and into the new home they have purchased in Bradenton for the last year of his ministry at Annunciation.

Rev. Dr. Benton Woods, Rector

In January, 1976, the vestry called the Rev. Benton Woods to succeed Father Lowe at a salary of missing years in the church's vestry minutes, but we know that the Eileen Watson Memorial Garden and George Tuttle Memorial altar were blessed by Bishop Haynes on January 21, 1978.

Father Wood declared that 1978 would be "the Year of Beautification" for the church and grounds. The addition of three stained glass windows to the church greatly enhanced its looks. Wes Pritchard chaired a committee charged with coming up with master plan for the Memorial Garden.

When the abutting pink house came on the market again, the Vestry offered the Harrisons \$45,000, with life occupancy in the house upon payment of taxes, insurance, and maintenance, but the offer was turned down.

Prayer Book revision

After 8 years of trial liturgies, the green book, the zebra book, and other experimental liturgies, the General Convention of the national church in 1979 adopted the prayer book of 1979 as the only Book of Common Prayer. But change is hard. In a pastoral letter written by Dr. Wood to the congregation, he said, he would purchase the 1979 Books of Common Prayer and put them in the pews. The 1928 prayer books would be retained in the pews for use at weddings, funerals, and other special services, as authorized by the bishop. "All services at Annunciation will be Rite I. I will omit the abhorrent 'kiss of peace.' We will not disrupt the beauty and dignity of our services playing 'huggy bear.' Let us continue to stand tall in retaining the magnificent tradition of our Anglican heritage. With God's help, we shall prevail."

Plans for the Memorial Garden were the focus of the next few years. The original plan was to have a columbarium with 80 niches, which could be sold for \$250 each, to pay for the columbarium. All were shocked when the architect estimated the cost of the garden at \$31,000. One vestryman noted that the current trend is to bury the ashes in the ground, rather than putting them in a columbarium. In October of 1977, the parish approved Wes Pritchard's plan for the Memorial Garden.

In 1977, a Needlepoint committee was initiated by Evelyn Jones and Elizabeth Bouterse. Church member Wes Pritchard drew the designs, and the ECW allocated \$350 to purchase canvass and wool to make cushions for the altar rail.

At the Annual Meeting in January of 1978 "Dr. Wood talked about the state of the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. today. He said he is greatly distressed by the actions of the National Church up North, including permitting desecration of the Book of Common Prayer, the ordination of homosexuals, and marriages of the same sex. He said that Annunciation "has pulled up the moat and is sticking to the Prayer Book and having dignified services." He called on parishioners to "stick to the morals and faith we have been taught and to fight the good fight."

Dr. Wood praised our Bishop Haynes who stood up for the Orthodox faith. He does not recommend that we leave the National Church, but suggests that we keep the faith. He is “proud of the way Annunciation has stood up for our beliefs.”

The vestry authorized extension of the parish hall to tie in to the south end of the memorial garden arbor at a cost of \$3,158. The vestry also approved Taylor Collins’ Eagle Scout project of moving rocks from the church wall to the sign on Gulf Drive, where he will build a rock garden.

The annual report in January, 1980 said that this year they have purchased a new central air conditioning system for Lowe Hall, a new refrigerator, a ceiling fan for the church, and major landscaping of the Gulf Drive frontage area. There are 285 baptized members, 275 communicants, not counting the snow birds. Total attendance for the year was over 13,000, up 5,000 from four years ago. There are three Sunday School classes: a nursery, one for pre-schoolers through first grade, and a grade school class.

In April 1980 the vestry appointed a committee to explore better utilization of existing parish facilities and to project plans for future buildings and renovations to our present structures. The committee recommended that to accommodate the larger attendance in season, the church should offer three services at 8, 9:15, and 10:30. No increase in the size of the church was recommended. They noted that the parish hall does not adequately meet current needs and suggested to increase the parish hall to the south by 24 feet to provide additional meeting and dining space and room for Sunday School. They also recommended getting a formal agreement with the Harrisons regarding giving the church first refusal on their property abutting the church.

The Vestry offered the Harrisons \$50,000 for their house in October, but again the offer was refused. Finally in April, 1981, the Harrisons accept an offer of \$55,000 for their house, but in two weeks the deal fell apart because some relative offered Mr. Harper, Mrs. Harrison’s brother who now lives there, \$62,000. The church is very disappointed.

In January, 1981, there was concern about the new mission opening on Longboat Key. Dr. Wood said, “We cannot expect every Episcopalian to drive up the length of gulf Drive to Annunciation. We cannot expect a continuation of the remarkable growth in numbers and in dollars we have experienced during the past four years. Let me assure you that we are a healthy, active, and vigorous parish, and above all a steadfast parish in the faith and worship of the church. And we will remain healthy, active, and steadfast if we resist the eroding influences of the world, and I’m sorry to say, at time in the Church, of our God-given morals and our God-given faith.”

The church has never had by-laws, so in March, 1981, a by-law committee was appointed by the Rector.

Mel Abel chaired a committee that made great improvements on the area fronting Gulf Drive. They installed a sprinkling system, laid sod, leaving room for plantings around the trees. They

shelled the driveway and then planted 400 plants, all donated by the Abels. Meanwhile, Wes Pritchard was overseeing the installation of the Dorothea statue and waterfall in the garden. The Memorial garden is kept in beautiful bloom year round by taking plants in and out of the garden three times a year. A nursery of plants for the next season is maintained at the home of the Abels.

In March, 1981, the vestry initiated a capital improvements campaign to raise \$32,000 to improve the kitchen, carpet the church, and build a carport and maintenance facility next to the rectory garage. They also wanted to erect a bell tower at a cost of \$4,500 as soon as memorial funds are obtained to pay for it.

The bell tower money was raised quickly, and Bishop Haynes came to dedicate it in February of 1983. The St. Mary bell was custom cast by the famous Whitechapel Foundry of London, maker of the bells of Westminster Abbey, Big Ben, and America's Liberty Bell. Ours is made of brass: 77% copper and 23% tin, and weighs 200 pounds. It is 20 inches in diameter and is tuned to the key of A. The bell was first tolled on Christmas Eve, 1982, with Pam Stewart, organizer of the project, doing the ringing.

The other capital improvement plans moved more slowly and the project continued to grow in size. In October, 1983, the vestry approved a plan to provide a 24 foot extension to the parish hall, creating 2 Sunday School rooms and a choir room. Also there was to be an additional bathroom and renovation of the present men's room, renovation of the electrical system and air conditioning of the church and the hall. With furnishings, the cost is estimated at \$68,000—and they are still wrestling with how to enlarge the sacristy and move the parish office. By the time they broke ground in January, 1984, they had decided to extend the proposed addition by an additional 14' x 24' to make two new offices and remodel the sacristy. When the project went out to bid, the cost was estimated at \$95,000.

Just 2 months later, they had raised \$69,000 in cash and pledges of \$29,000. By December, 1986, the building loan was completely paid off. They hoped to have the new addition ready for the opening of Sunday School in September, 1984. When completed it was named Lowe Hall in recognition of Father Lowe's ministry at Annunciation.

Meanwhile, the women were continuing to work on improvements to the Memorial Garden. In 1984, four women put in a total of 1450 hours. They planted the evergreen cross, remarking at the time, that they would probably never live long enough to see it mature. Happily, two of those women, Mel Abel and Bettylee Marquis-Kral have indeed lived long enough to see the results of their labors and to enjoy the beautiful cross. At the same time, they added jasmine to the arbor and the fence, where it screens the view of the carports. Today the blooming of that jasmine each spring is a much-anticipated event at Annunciation, as its sweet scent fills the garden area.

This was a good time for Annunciation. Annual attendance in 1983 was 14,000, with a record breaking 488 for Easter. So good that in September 198 the vestry named the Rev. Charles Sanford as their non-stipendiary assistant to the rector, serving the high season months of January through April. The church was able to donate several times to the new mission church of St George's in Bradenton and to the Church of the Nativity in Sarasota.

In 1987, the vestry planned for the improvement of the northeast quadrant of the property. Trees were cut down and parking created, as well as providing access to the church from 45th Street.

Father Wood announced at the annual meeting in January, 1988 that he would retire in September, 1988. By March, the search committee had received word from 112 candidates, 37 of whom were seriously interested in the position. The committee was asked to bring 2-6 names to the vestry. The Rev. Philip Baxter of Lakeland was asked to serve as interim rector until a new rector can be called.

When Father Wood retired in September, 1988, the vestry gave \$1000 to the scholarship endowment fund at St. Stephens School in honor of Fr. Wood. This was added to the sizeable donation made by the ECW to the same fund. At this time, the sexton moved into the rectory temporarily to oversee the property and to work on some rectory renovations projects.

Rev. Richard G. Fellows

In November, 1988, the vestry issued a unanimous call to the Rev. Richard G. Fellows to be their third rector, offering him an annual stipend of \$21,000. He was installed the following February.

Adjoining property is again an issue in August, 1989 when the Gulf Drive lot and house (now the large south parking lot) went on the market for \$149,000. The church was finally able to buy the property in March for \$115,000. The vestry approved a loan of \$100,000, with a capital fund campaign to pay it back. The house there had been made into two apartments, but they both would have to be renovated in order to be rentable. After much discussion it is decided that renovation is too costly. They would not try to rent it.

Fr. Fellows began his first leave of absence for rehabilitation in August of 1990. Rev. Richard Bennett was asked to fill in during his absence, beginning his long affiliation with Annunciation. When Fr. Fellows returned in November, he told the vestry that because of the situation in the Middle East, he may be called from the Reserves to active duty.

In 1991, in keeping with changes taking place in the Church world-wide, the Bouvard Shell Memorial Altar was moved away from the wall and the ends cut back. It became a free-standing altar, with the priest facing the congregation for the first time. Rite II services were first celebrated at this time also. A further sign of the times is that the vestry voted to allow no smoking in any church room or hallway by a vote of 9-1.

In 1992, the vestry established the church endowment fund, using a bequest from the Bessie Nied estate as starter money. Attorney Thomas Stewart is the primary force to get this

accomplished. The ECW paid to have new red carpeting installed in the church (replacing gold colored carpet), and Lenten Soup Suppers were started. At that time also, St. Mary, our Blessed Mother Chapter of the Daughters of the King received their charter. The church still owed \$64,780 on the loan they took to purchase the Gulf Drive house and lot.

Fr. Fellows was called by his National Guard unit to help with hurricane devastation following hurricane Andrew in September, 1992, and again Fr. Bennett fills in.

In May, 1993, following a planning retreat, the vestry agreed that the time has come to provide adequate space for office and Christian Education, better housing for the rector, and further improvement of the music program. Because there appears no viable use of the house at 4306 Gulf Drive, it should be torn down.

The church had grown by 36% from an average of 146 per Sunday in 1988 to 199 per Sunday in 1993. Pledges have grown from 90 in 1988 to 144 in 1993. There were three services every Sunday at 7:30, 9, and 11 am. "The church is at a crossroads," says their report. "We have grown to the point where we can no longer accommodate much more growth with our present facility under present conditions. We are not big enough to support a capital fund drive that would relieve our crowding and accommodate the expansion we know we need."

One solution would be to find a new, larger rectory, using the old one for church needs: Sunday School, choir, meetings, etc. Property on the island is very expensive, but they began to look.

In July, 1985, Father Fellows was to have taken a month of vacation, followed by a month or more of sabbatical. Instead he had a "very unfortunate and unpleasant time." During his vacation he underwent surgery which was improperly done, resulting in infection. This caused great discomfort and extended healing. His son has also had serious health problems.

The roof of both the church and Lowe Hall must be replaced in 1995. They took a loan of \$35,000 from the Union National Bank and will conduct a campaign to raise the money for repayment.

A bright spot in 1995 is the hiring of Thom Tenny as organist. In the next 20 years, Thom worked hard to improve all facets of the music program at the church.

In January, 1996, Annunciation notified the diocese that they are unable to pay their full diocesan assessment. Payments totaling \$8,600 will have to be made up in 1996. New Junior Warden Evan Robinson told the vestry that a great deal of work needs to be done on church property. The rectory needs painting, and wrecking the house on Gulf Drive will cost \$6,200, plus more to clear the lot, level it, and apply shell for parking. Finally there are carpenter ants in the dead vines over the altar in the Memorial Garden. The house on Gulf Drive was razed that summer.

The church formed a sister relationship with a small Episcopal Church in Colima, Mexico, in 1996. It was a tiny mission, served by a non-stipendiary priest who is also a dentist. Over the next few years, Annunciation works hard to help the mission and even sends a team down there to determine how we can best serve them. The relationship ends when we find there was misuse of the funds at the diocesan level.

Money was tight at this time. The treasurer reported 122 pledges totaling \$130,862 in 1997. The previous year there were 130 pledges for \$133,000.

The vestry made an agreement with the Harrisons in the house abutting the church in 1997 that grants them use of 10.5 feet of our property to give them a driveway. This agreement is exclusive to the Harrisons and must be reconsidered if the property is sold.

The church's outstanding assessment balance from 1996 and 1997 is \$13,766. How grateful they were to learn the diocese has forgiven the debt.

At this time, Deacon Barbara Carmine was assigned to the Church of the Annunciation. During her long affiliation with the parish, she made many home visits and hospital calls. She trained Eucharistic ministers and took an active part in the Sunday services.

In August, 1999, Fr. Fellows was granted a ninety day medical leave with full remuneration, and the church also agreed to pay \$2500 as their portion of his health care at Health Care Connections in Tampa. Although Fr. Fellows returned to work in November, he offered his resignation on June 2, 2000.

In July, 2000 Bishop Lipscomb assigned the Rev. Jack Hyde as Rector under Special Circumstances. It was an uneasy alliance right from the start and only became more difficult as the months went by. Attendance and pledges dropped off, and by September the vestry had to secure a line of credit of \$25,000 to cover operating expenses until the end of the year.

Fr. Hyde resigned in December, 2001, leaving the parish disgruntled and divided. The Rev. Bennett Barnes was asked to serve as Interim Rector while the parish got itself sorted out. As suggested by the Bishop, the parish contracted with the Career and Counseling Center in Tampa to identify the issues which were impeding healthy parish growth.

Father Barnes was a retired clergyman with many years' experience and an impressive resume. He had served as Headmaster at St Stephen's School. He proved to be just the stabilizing force that was needed, and soon Annunciation was back on track and the search began for a new and permanent rector.

After a long search, the parish called The Rev. Harry Parsell from St. Petersburg to be the fifth rector of Annunciation in June, 2003.

Fr. Harry was a warm outgoing priest who soon attracted many new members and promoted the return of many who had dropped out during the rocky years that preceded his arrival. Before long Annunciation was again the warm, welcoming parish it had been in the 70's. Fr. Harry initiated a campaign to take care of long-neglected maintenance issues and improvements to the facility. A new processional cross was purchased as a memorial to Sally Allison. 20 choir chairs with book racks and kneelers were acquired. Vestryman Robert Pettus donated a fine, new Allan renaissance organ. Changes were made to make the church and hall accessible to the handicapped and to make better use of existing space. Mr. and Mrs. Allan Mossberg donated a six foot high statue of Jesus for the Gulf Drive parking area, drawing the attention of those passing by to the church entrance. Jr. Warden Ron Pepka worked with the county to make the plantings in the Memorial Garden more native species and plants requiring less water. The whole facility was looking better and better.

Fr. Harry also worked to improve the music program. Carol Cornman was hired as soloist and section leader, and as the budget allowed, other section leaders were hired. Carole initiated a Friends in Music Program in which professional musicians are invited to perform, often with Carole, in a special musical program. Proceeds from the concerts provide instrumentalists and soloists for special church services throughout the year.

Fr. Harry initiated the first Oktoberfest in 2003, and encouraged a full schedule of social events that helped parishioners get to know each other better. The events also provide an easy way for winter residents to become involved in the church and an important part of the parish family.

In 2004, Father Richard Bennett retired after serving at Annunciation for 14 years. He moved nearer his family in Illinois, but still keeps in contact with friends in the parish. A year later Charlotte Long retired as parish treasurer, a position she had held for 18 years. Charlotte was replaced by Diana Kizer, who resigned after just two months on the job. Charlotte was back at her old post.

Also in 2004, the parish embarked on a \$10,000 program to landscape and improve the rear parking area on Second Avenue. Attendance on Sundays at Annunciation increased by 20%, the largest increase in the diocese. The Bishop appointed Father Harry to be Dean of Manasota deanery. In 2006, there were 94 pledges totaling \$181,718.

In January, 2007, Jack Lewis moved into the parish. He was a retired bank officer with former experience as a church treasurer, and Jack became treasurer at Annunciation. Charlotte Long was finally able to retire.

In 2007, an anonymous donor, a neighbor of the church, donated a new carillon. It rings the quarter hours and plays seasonal hymns at noon and 6 pm.

Parish improvements continued with a new baptismal font, made from an enormous seashell, a new fence around the rectory grounds, and the rectory was painted for the first time in 13 years.

A Sunday School, was started for the first time in many years, largely made up of grandchildren of our active parishioners.

There was a major crisis in January, 2008 when we learn that both the hot and cold water in the church and in Lowe hall has to be re-piped because the old pipes are???

This will cost \$12,000 and there was no money in the budget. The crisis initiated a three year capital fund drive which ultimately raises _____ Most of the improvements in recent years have been taken from the investment fund, and there was concern that we are eating away at the principle. The vestry voted that in the future they will expend no more than 10% from the investment fund for operating costs.

The issue of the Harrison house next door came up again in 2009. The owners want to put the house on the market and hope to get one million dollars for it. The church has first refusal on this property, but the vestry decided we have no use for the property at this time. The house would not be usable as it is, and renovating it for church use would be cost prohibitive.

In June, 2010, Father Harry retired, after 30 years as a priest. He had turned Annunciation around and is leaving a strong, healthy parish. In fact, the Bishop said that since the parish was strong and healthy, he suggested a more streamlined search process for a new priest. The vestry acted as the search team. After a busy summer, the vestry called the Rev. Dee Ann deMontmollin from North Carolina to be the new priest-in-charge.

Rev. Dee arrived in November, 2010. She is warmly welcomed by the congregation and soon well-loved for her warm, pastoral manner. In June, 2011 the vestry voted unanimously to name her Rector. The Church of the Annunciation is again moving ahead with new ministries, new energy and enthusiasm, and new members.