



OUR PARISH'S HISTORY

Beginning in 1837, Episcopal clergy visited Columbia from time to time and celebrated Holy Communion in private homes. Otherwise, there was little parochial activity until 1849, when Bishop Alonzo Potter, of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, sent the Rev. Dwight Lyman to establish a permanent parish in Columbia.

The group originally met in a Presbyterian Church. The cornerstone for the first Saint Paul Church was laid on October 6, 1849 at the corner of South Second Street and Avenue I, where the former Fire / Police Building is located. This church was consecrated on May 28, 1850. The picturesque structure of blue limestone was of English design and consisted of a nave, chancel, high-pitched roof and a belfry. There are pictures of this original church in the Groome Room in the present church building.

The small congregation, mostly laborers of Welsh and English origin, found themselves in the minority. Pennsylvania Germans worshipping in the Lutheran or Reformed tradition and members of the plain sects heavily dominated the area. Anglicans have traditionally made up a small proportion of churchgoers in this area of Pennsylvania. The early Saint Paul Parish led a precarious financial existence. In the first twenty years, some ten clergymen came and left in rapid succession. During this period, six other Episcopal parishes were seeded from Saint Paul with two surviving into the present time (Saint Paul in Manheim and Saint John in Marietta). One source of conflict during this era was the moral issue of slavery. The laboring families of Columbia opposed the holding of slaves, while the farmers in the outlying rural areas tended to favor it.

During the 1880's, the Rev. Francis Moran dreamed of great things for Saint Paul and encouraged the building of a new church on Locust Street in the center of Columbia. The new church, built at a cost of \$26,000, with a seating capacity of 350, was consecrated on January 25, 1888. A stone parish house was built at the rear of the church in 1891, but was not consecrated until 1910 when a wealthy benefactor in the parish (Mr. H. M. North) agreed to assume the balance on the considerable debt of the building.

The great prosperity envisioned by Father Moran never materialized and Saint Paul Parish found itself to be vastly overbuilt. Like many of the towns along the Susquehanna, Columbia's prominence as a manufacturing and railroad center was short-lived and by 1910, the town was slowly beginning to decline economically.

Additions have been made to the church over the years. During the Depression, when the cost of heating the large church became a financial drain, the Holy Communion Chapel in the crypt of the church was built. It continued to be used into the late 1950's when it was abandoned as no longer necessary. In 1945, Dr. and Mrs. John Denny gave the church a marble altar and hand carved wooden reredos depicting a crucifix and figures of the Virgin Mary, Saint John the Evangelist, and Saints Peter and Paul. Other changes followed, including a rood screen, a new flagstone aisle in the nave, installation of glass entrance doors, renovation of the parish offices, and refurbishing of a meeting area for small groups. One of our largest capital projects was the structural renovation of our bell tower, which was completed in 2001. In early 2002, the interior of the church was painted in rich Victorian colors. In 2004 the Holy Communion Chapel was refurbished and reopened and is used for weekday services. During 2009, major renovations were completed in the church (new heating system, new carpet, and the refinishing of the hardwood floors). In addition, the main room of the parish hall was completely renovated with new heating / air-conditioning system, ceiling, lights, windows, and floor. The room was painted and new tables and chairs were added and the Sunday School classrooms got new carpet. The challenge of maintaining our large physical plant and adapting it to our needs has been with us for many years and will continue to be a part of our future. In the summer of 2004, the Vestry of the parish voted to stay in our present location in the heart of Columbia because we are a city parish and we are needed here.

The fortunes of our congregation have been intimately linked to those of the larger community. We have a strong core of older, longtime parishioners who are residents of Columbia Borough. Many of our newer, younger members live in the outlying suburban areas of York and Lancaster Counties with some families traveling considerable distances to be active members of our parish family. Since mid-2003, we have grown in our weekly attendance from an average of 67 on a Sunday morning to almost 100 today. In January 2006 the parish hall was renamed the Mary Elizabeth Bair Parish Center in honor of long-time member and former Senior Warden, Mary Elizabeth Bair who died on January 2, 2006. Part of her mission was to bring people together and she spent much time in our parish hall doing just that.

While our history is rich in tradition, Saint Paul Parish will only have a future if we can continue to welcome all who want to know the Lord Jesus Christ. We must continue our traditions of the past while together we build new traditions for the future. The demographics of Columbia are changing and we must develop new ministries and new programs to answer both the human and secular needs of people as well as to satisfy their spiritual hungers.

We are committed as a parish to be an urban church - an ever-present sign to our community that God loves his people and that Jesus Christ is present, that God's kingdom is really here, and that together we can make Jesus Christ known to the people of Columbia and the surrounding areas.

Our mission as a parish is "Together Building the Kingdom of God." Jesus Christ brought the Kingdom of God here to earth with his birth over 2000 years ago. At his Resurrection, the Kingdom of God here on earth was fully made known to us. It is now our task to continue to build that Kingdom so it becomes present, real, and visible to all peoples. At Saint Paul, food is an ever-present reality. We eat at the Table of the Lord, we feed thousands of people each year through our food bank and free community meals, and whenever we gather in fellowship there is always food to share with one another. These times of food -- they feed, sustain, and nourish us on our journey.

In October 2005, the national office of the Episcopal Church designated Saint Paul as a "**Jubilee Ministry Center.**" This designation is given to those parishes that have demonstrated that they understand the community in which they exist and are making strides to answer the needs of the community. This is done by outreach ministries that address the needs of the community. Saint Paul has always had a strong outreach ministry and is pleased that we have received this recognition from our national church.

In the fall of 2006, the parish formally began a strategic planning process to determine the future of its mission and ministry in Columbia. This process also included an analysis of our facilities and how they can best be used for both parish and community functions and outreach. The parish is committed to Columbia and the needs of its people. This planning process resulted in an approved Mission and Ministry Plan that outlines the goals and objectives that we need to attain in order to continue to grow as a sign of God's Kingdom. On November 11, 2007, the Vestry approved the first Mission and Ministry Plan - 2008-2012. In the summer of 2011, the parish began the process of developing a second Mission and Ministry Plan and it was approved in early 2013. A copy of our Mission and Ministry Plan is available on the Mission and Ministry Plan page on this website. Along with the Scriptures, this Mission and Ministry Plan will guide us as we continue to grow in Spirituality, Service, and Size.

Beginning on June 29, 2008 and continuing for one year, we celebrated the International Year of Saint Paul. During this yearlong celebration, we celebrated the 160 anniversary of the founding of our parish and the 120 anniversary of the present church. As part of the Year of Saint Paul, there was an historical exhibit in the Groome Room in the church, which provided detailed information about our history as a parish family. It also marked the first year of our Annual Choir Festival that showcases choirs of area churches in a festival of prayer and music.

During the Year of Saint Paul, we embarked upon a capital campaign - "The Next Generation Capital Campaign - in order to complete necessary repairs to our facilities. We raised over \$355,000 to help fund our renovations.

Our entire existence these many years is to provide a place where an individual's life can meet the Kingdom of God. We are a parish family that will use its past to create its future. All are welcome - no matter where you are in your life's journey, there is room for you here in our family. Please join us!

Please come pray with us, celebrate with us, and grow with us as we "Together Build the Kingdom of God!"

You are invited! You are welcome! You are expected!

