



### **Women's Emerging Role**

Thirty St. Mark's ladies organized as the Dorcas Society in 1865–66 raised \$540.75 toward construction of St. Mark's, today's equivalent of \$8,600.

Women remained in a support role at St. Mark's until the women's suffrage movement began. Women had served as organist or choir director but could not be actual choir members until Rev. Walter Richardson returned from a trip to Chicago, where he heard choirs that included women. The first vested choir of mixed voices at St. Mark's sang for Thanksgiving Day in 1893—although the women did not proceed down the aisle with the men but slipped in from the sacristy at the side.

A profusion of women's guilds and societies soon expanded social activities and outreach, with Deaconess Frances Baylor Affleck coordinating visits to patients at hospitals and sanitariums during World War I. But vestry membership remained male-only. At the annual parish meeting in 1927, it was reported that the upcoming diocesan council might be asked to consider allowing women to serve on vestries. Parishioners voted that St. Mark's delegates were to oppose such a measure. There were only three dissents.

Thirty-eight years later, the Diocese of West Texas finally permitted women to serve on vestries. Five years after that, in 1970, Susan Avery was elected the first woman vestry member at St. Mark's. In 1978 Betty Ullman became the first woman member certified as a lay reader. "I was so glad we were all robed," she remembered. "The congregation could not see my shaking legs."

In 1992, the Rev. Mary Margaret Mueller became the church's first female assistant rector. In 2014 the Rev. Beth Knowlton was chosen the first female rector, joining associate rector Carol

Morehead plus several women now on the vestry in a trend that, connecting the dots, would have severely shaken the St. Mark's of 1927.

Written by Lewis Fisher from his book *St. Mark's Episcopal Church: 150 Years of Ministry in Downtown San Antonio*