



“One of Americas Great Parishes”

In the exuberance of the 1920s, St. Mark’s replaced its adjacent parish hall and the historic residence next door with a new parish hall and auditorium complex. Some advocated continuing with plans to expand the nave and build a tower, but cooler heads decided to first pay down existing debt. It was a fortunate decision.

Payment of even that debt caused a crisis after the stock market crash of 1929, and the entire church facility seemed headed toward foreclosure. The vestry hired a collector on a commission basis to collect overdue pledges from harried parishioners, trying out the idea that a pledge was a legal contract, but the attempt got nowhere. Finally, members responded to a last-ditch fund drive, and disaster was averted.

With indebtedness paid and World War II over, St. Mark’s entered a period of new growth and prosperity. The final phase of the 1920s expansion plan was at last implemented in 1949. Noted church architect Henry Steinbomer designed conversion of the two rear external side doors of the nave into windows compatible with the original windows, and cut doorways at the back into a newly added narthex. The exit from the narthex to Pecan Street was through a tower modified from the 1926 design. Two years later, Bethlehem Chapel was added, opening from the cloister connecting the narthex with the parish hall.

The number of communicants at St. Mark’s soared to 3,102 by 1955, making St. Mark’s the third largest Episcopal church in the nation. Already rectors of St. Mark’s had gone on to become diocesan bishops throughout the country—of Delaware, Los Angeles, East Carolina, Olympia,

Wyoming and West Texas. A national church magazine proclaimed St. Mark's "one of America's great parishes."

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