The Consecration of ST. MARK'S Episcopal Church

By BISHOP C. KILMER MYERS

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1979

600 Colorado Avenue
Palo Alto, California

THE CONSECRATION

October 21, 1979

The First Twenty-Five Years

EARLY IN 1948 the Spirit moved eighteen Episcopal families to organize a church in the fast-growing southern area of Palo Alto. Within a few months the group bought one and three-quarters acres of land and within a few more months built a chapel and Sunday School rooms, employed a rector, conducted the first of many successful rummage sales, progressed from mission to parish status—and *almost* elected a woman vestryman (in those years this would have been a striking innovation!).

After lengthy discussion of the careers of three equally worthy saints we chose Saint Mark as the patron of our new parish.

Within nine years we had tripled our land ownership and had built five more buildings: the Parish House, two Sunday School buildings, a Rectory (now used as parish offices), and the main Church. In the Church is a magnificent Casavant pipe organ.

To the best of our knowledge no such full-blown parish has ever arisen in the Diocese of California. It is a record of extraordinary determination, imagination, skills, generosity, and leadership.

Alongside this physical growth there developed lively and flourishing supportive groups: the Choir, always of artistic excellence; Episcopal Church Women; Altar Guild; Saint Elizabeth's Guild; Henry's (Lewis) Angels; a group of financial counselors; a competent Sunday School staff; the Good Samaritans; and still others.

Saint Mark's has never had a calm life. Changes in the neighborhood, in members, in the appraisal of priorities, in Christian beliefs, in selecting appropriate ways to move toward our goals, and in personalities of our clergy, have time and again required us to review our operations and purposes. Through all these years a stalwart and loyal membership has maintained and strengthened our original 1948 aim:

". . . that by the will of its people,
this Church shall be:
And by the Will and Grace of God,
it shall prevail."

Photo by Joan Dinkelspiel

Bishop C. Kilmer Myers

Photo by Roger Richard

Bishop Coadjutor William E. Swing

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE LIFE OF SAINT MARK'S PARISH SINCE THE QUARTER-CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF 1973

- The conception, design, and building of ALL SOULS MEMORIAL GARDEN, a holy place for the burial of ashes of members who have passed to another life.
- The strengthening of the floor of the Church and the laying of a needed new and more pleasing floor covering.
- The bringing of the 10 o'clock service in the original chapel into a true and complete Alternative Service with adaptation for children and young persons.
- Gifts by shareholders of 564 Colorado Corporation (the Todorovic property) that brought Saint Mark's into controlling interest (about two-thirds) in that adjoining half-acre of property.
- Sponsorship of a Chinese family of thirteen, "boat people" refugees from Vietnam, who arrived in August and have been housed at 564 Colorado.
- The development of twin gardens, one for the growing of altar flowers and one (in the artichoke patch) for vegetables grown by members.
- The choir's increasing capability and expanding performance schedule that enhance worship services and enrich community musical life.
- Cooperation with the Palo Alto Unified School District in 1978 and 1979 to insure continuation summertime community school when Proposition 13 cutbacks threatened its existence.
- The decision to stay with the Diocese of California and Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, rather than to join with southern diocesan parishes to form the new Diocese of El Camino Real.
- Maintenance and improvement of the physical plant over the past six years, spearheaded by the Building and Grounds Committee, including the reroofing and installation of new doors at Saint Mark's Chapel and new roof and paint for the Parish Hall.
- Providing for the operation of several child-care facilities, because of our continuing concern for children.
- Twenty-five needlepoint kneelers of original design, for placement at the altar, made by Saint Mark's women during the past two years.
- The especially active participation of the Parish in the selection of our new Bishop Coadjutor, William E. Swing.
- Redecoration in the office building, including a special place for Magnificat, the cat who adopted Saint Mark's.

Three Gifts

She was young, pretty, engaged and wanted the rector's company in revisiting her church of St. Mark after a long absence—and almost immediately upon entering she broke into tears.

The priest, if startled, did not show it, but remained slightly behind her, watching closely as she waded gingerly into that awesome combination of quiet and semi-darkness toward the stained-glass windows adorning the narthex, touched them with hungry fingers, then reached high to trace the raised brass lettering indicating the donors of the windows—squinted in the many-colored light, trying to read the names, failed, and walked unsteadily toward a heavy, intricately carved table nearby, leaning heavily upon it.

"Barkans!" she said sharply.

"The Barkan family gave this to the church!"

The priest nodded silently.

She turned quickly and headed for the leaded-glass doors leading into the nave, pausing as she pushed through them to touch the wood, the glass, the metal—entered and stroked the solid, hand-carved pews, hefted a copy of the Book of Common Prayer, stooped to caress the once-familiar leather covering of the kneeling bars. Then she straightened and almost rushed forward, heading down the south aisle toward St. Nicholas' Chapel—touching, touching—the solid, unchanged pieces of a childhood memory.

With a gentle tug she unlatched and opened the wrought iron gate leading into the chapel, stepped in quickly, and turned to gaze at the renaissance depiction of good St. Nick, the cherubs, the adoring child, and its baubles.

"The Wing family gave this chapel," she announced and echoes half-repeated her words.

Captured still by her frenetic revery she pushed forward past a battery of unlighted votive candles and through a second and matching iron gate toward the Sanctuary, skipped lightly up the steps leading past the pulpit and into the chancel, bowing neatly as she approached the candle-lighted Ambry and came to a halt, finally, before the dossal curtain, the altar and its precious Symbol.

The priest came up behind her slowly, as though waiting for an invitation to her private thoughts but she seemed not to notice. Instead she concentrated on still another brass marker located near the reredos.

"What's the story on Robert E. Clarke?" she demanded, trying to sound controlled—adult.

The priest came to her side.

"Robert Clarke was a rich and powerful man, a millionaire—president of his company, and chairman of the board too, I suppose—with influence in several arenas. He was also a very determined man, who rarely explained his actions, who listened carefully to the opinions of others, but with limited patience. It is also said he was aloof, enigmatic, brusque—a man who spoke quietly, yet always managed to be heard and understood. And he was a very supportive man."

"You mean," she interrupted, "he gave St. Mark's a lot of money."

"I mean," said the priest, "a lot of important, creative events occurred while Robert and Amy Clarke were a part of St. Mark's. They got things done and they saw to it that others did the same. And, yes. There was a lot of money given to the church—anonymously—always enough, and never too much

—he had also the canny businessman's eye for—how shall I say it—fiscal propriety.

"As for a story," he added, "I know of no Robert Clarke stories, probably because stories involve opposition, confrontation, and resolution—and there were few who opposed him and chose to talk afterwards about the experience."

The girl seemed lost in thought.

"I wonder why," she said finally, "he did—this," and she waved vaguely toward the walls, the windows, the body of the church.

"One never knows for sure—about the Robert Clarkes of this world. He was a puzzle whose intricate solution lay hidden somewhere inside the man. We can observe his direction, but the rest is—speculative, at best."

"Well," she said, "if you're going to speculate to yourself—and I can see clearly that you are—you may as well do it out loud!"

The priest laughed.

"Robert and Amy Clarke represented—and there are many like them here at St. Mark's—a rather special blend of feelings toward God, family, and country—not always in that order, of course. In this case, *family* was embodied in the figure of an only son. His name was Harvey, and in 1944 he was just old enough to be engaged to a pretty girl—like you—only there was a war going on. Harvey was a sailor serving on a destroyer somewhere in the Solomons, a small and, it seems now, insignificant group of islands in the South Pacific and he was killed—on his 24th birthday—during an enemy air attack."

"Oh," she said, and became still.

"Perhaps that was the conflict—the confrontation," she said finally.

"Perhaps," said the priest, as he allowed his gaze to shift unobtrusively from the altar to the great organ nearby.

"Another family which understands this—shall I call it 'lifestyle'—are the Philbricks. Their way of expressing the God-Family-Country blend has, with this gift," he circled the organ with a generous arm motion, "been extended through two generations. It's a gift to the community—not just the church. Recently we heard Bach's magnicent Toccata and Fugue—felt it rather—shiver the timbers of St. Mark's and my own, and those of everyone else present. It's a grand piece of music when it's well played—as it was—and an unforgettable experience when played on this organ."

"Geraldine sang in the choir," noted the girl.

"Yes. And so did your mother. And so did you!" he smiled broadly.

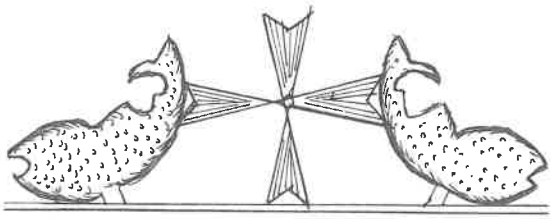
"Sometimes with no shoes on," she giggled.

The priest was leading the way back, now, and they both paused, stooped and pointed to the ghostly figures in the Gethsemane stone, descended in step into the north transept, passing and touching the Baptismal Font.

As he opened the door leading to the sacristy he said lightly, "By the way, have you seen the Amy Clarke Garden? It's going to be lovely by June."

"Father, you're leading," she laughed. "Anyway, you know I want to be married here in St. Mark's."

The rector allowed that he couldn't have imagined otherwise as he guided the two of them into the sacristy—back toward the present—toward the bright sunlight, outside.



"Love, talent, power; jealousy, anger, separation; the petty, and the grand; the joyful, the pitiful, and the unforgiven. St. Mark's has seen, accepted, and survived them all," said the woman, one who had been there in the beginning, who had followed her star path into other parts of Christendom, had returned, and was swapping stories with other, younger women. The three provided one another with a perfect combination of audience and storyteller, switching roles as the ideas bounced off memories—three women of different times, standing in the transept—back-lighted by a morning sun streaming through colored glass. Questions interrupted the flow, the chronology. Context changed unpredictably. What prevailed was a feeling of investigation, of insistent curiosity, a mutual need to wonder and explain—names that appear, sometimes briefly in the minutes of old vestry meetings, on yellowing bills of sale, on church calendars of three decades: clerks, clergymen, musicians, guild members, vergers, committeemen—the most intense personal history of a thousand souls told in the dust-dry language of more than a thousand Sundays past.

"More than a generation, now—of this," she related. "Maybe it was stronger in the beginning,

when it had to be. Maybe it has taken on more subtle qualities, directions—a different, sort of stable condition seems to prevail now."

"I think of Mildred Poole," she related. "There just aren't many like her around anymore—*genteel* is the word I want to use, though it has sort of gone out of use as a word. Mildred could sense in others talents that they hardly dared to believe existed in themselves, and she could extract—or entice from all of us these gifts in such a charming and artless fashion that we hardly noticed our labors—if that's what they were."

"And the men! Walter Gaspar, who stands as tall now, in his nineties as ever he did as a marine officer—bossing things, he was then: the digging of ditches for water mains, planting shrubs, trees, gardens; putting up fences. He and Schuy Gros were the functional superintendents of nearly everything that stands today. Bob Miller, Allen and Annie Adelia Ferguson, Toby Plough, Ted Harper, the Thomases. So many names. So many people. So much giving!"

And suddenly, tears came to this woman, too.

"*Giving of themselves!* It's such an overused term. But—is there a better way to say it?"

The three women pondered this one silently, and concluded, tacitly, that a good illustration is better than any abstract idea.

"I remember Walter installing a window in the old choir loft," said one, "so that the choir could breathe—things got very close in there as our congregation expanded—he and Bob Carpenter. Walter had so many titles: Colonel of the Marines, Mayor of Palo Alto, Junior Warden at All Saints, Lector—and I think the one that fit him best was Senior Warden of St. Mark's. He liked leading and he led well, but he could also plant a Monterey Pine, or move furniture after a Markers' dinner, or any other job that needed doing."

"And," she added with an impish grin, "he managed always to be so procedural about it—so orderly. But that was his way."

"And Bob Davis fixing the plumbing," said a second, "though it was not just the plumbing, or the machinery, or installing walls, or providing immaculate vestments that I'm talking about. It's the sense of order, and something else that rather eludes me—"

"Presence!" said the third woman.

"Presenting themselves—as they really were," amended the first.

"Remember Cala Lemberger?" she asked, and her companions nodded quickly.

"St. Mark's became *her* family, and by St. Mark's I mean *all* of it: grounds, buildings, staff, and clergy—the *whole* thing. Nor was there any doubt in anyone's mind who was the head of that family. Cala was the first person into church every Sunday and she sat in the same seat every Sunday—right there in the third pew. That was *her* spot and she would and did reserve it for herself against all would-be intruders, regardless of title, accomplishment, and any other worldly precondition."

"There was a funeral here one day for a high-ranking military officer—not on a Sunday, of course, and I guess Cala just got tangled up in her busy extra-Episcopal schedule and was tardy. Among the mourners was a two-star general and he had been positioned handily so as to present the American Flag used in the ceremony—handily, but as it turned out, thoughtlessly—in Cala Lemberger's seat.

"Of course, Cala eventually showed up, waggled down to the front of the church and sat down next to the general—paused, and then with a single mighty *whump*—removed the interloper. The officer said later that he knew instantly he had been outranked."

"Betty Young told me this one," began the second woman.

"Betty Young?" inquired the third.

"Betty was synonymous with Sunday School here for just years," it was explained.

"Our initial church school was built, as you know, as an addition to the chapel, but when we turned on the heating system we discovered that we also turned on—in fact amplified and piped into the main chapel—every sound made in the classroom; so naturally there had to be changes. One of our options was Beaudoin's Dance Studio on Colorado Avenue with its huge practice mirrors. We guessed this would turn into a face-making and giggling disaster for the kids and the teacher. But, you know? It worked out quite differently. The kids, including the most devilish among them were awed by the place. It must have seemed like a great wrap-around eye of God to them—watching and reflecting their every move. They were absolute angels during the dance-studio days."

"And if Betty Young was synonymous with church school, then Sybil Kenyon meant kitchen. Nature had packaged all the spirit of Sunshine Mountain and a bear-hug into one large economy-size container—and that was Sybil. Rooms quivered

when Sybil chuckled. Ordinary furniture seemed to shrink from the awesome responsibility presented by her approach. But give Sybil a problem whose proportions matched her own and she was a ballerina, a circus queen, a kind of Valkyrian railroad section-boss all in one. There was no task within range of our fertile imaginations that was outside of Sybil's willingness or ability. But the kitchen was her specialty. Dinner for two and three hundred hungry people—from scratch, mind you. Under her careful direction the stove became a palette, and food the work of art that proceeded from it. My syllogism may be a bit rough around the edges here, but it is food that knows the pathway to men's hearts, and their hearts told them the truth—that regardless of tradition and precedent, this woman belonged on our vestry. And so it happened. Women have been on the vestry ever since. But Sybil led the way."

Pouring forth without plan or direction, stories leap-frogged time, nudged one another as sequence interfered with the potent urge of reinvestigation—and, like the sunlight pouring into the nave, became transformed into a many-hued spectrum of energy in action—people remembering people.

"Bill Smith was on hand the day that Cala Lemberger called for her personal chauffeur, Paul Jones, who doubled as our Sexton—at Cala's discretion, of course. During her last years a powerful interdependence developed between Cala and our parish staff—and particularly Paul—but on this occasion he was absent, and Cala had a right-now-tone in her voice. Betty Noeller, our secretary, didn't quite know how to handle this one. She tried to explain that she herself couldn't leave the office and that the only other person around was Bill—and of course, Cala's instant solution to this was, 'Well, send *him*, then!' Betty turned and gazed, one guesses, a bit helplessly at Bill—Admiral William B. Smith, United States Navy, retired."

"What's up, Betty?" he boomed. And Betty explained.

"Tell Cala I'm on my way," said Bill, striding toward the parking lot.

"It seems," said a listener, chuckling, "that the military had a rough go of it during Cala's reign."

"Tell us about some of the earlier clergy," suggested one of the younger women. "Tanner Brown. He looks so serene, back there in the portrait in the fireside room."

"Father Brown was called—perhops a more appropriate term would be highjacked—by the immense emotional and spiritual vortex created during those first days and weeks. There was no church, no grounds. We met in private homes, later at the Community Center and at Dibble Hospital—and that meant carting the spiritual utensils back and forth every Sunday. In the meantime there were some fifty busy-busy little dynamos sparking in every direction: looking for sites, raising money, establishing credit, conferencing with Diocesan and local regulatory agencies, hiring architects, builders—and raising a few hackles on one another. Tanner Brown was perfect for this sort of dynamic walking among eggs. He was the glue that held together without holding us back. Dorothy, his wife, smoked, and you can imagine how that sat with some of us. I can guess, though, that it was one of her ways of saying, 'I am a person, too!'—and any clergyman's wife understands that one."

The speaker paused, and her audience could see a slight softening, an internal shifting of directions.

"I remember the occasion of their 35th wedding anniversary, and one of his last sermons, as I recall. Even the Lesson was appropriate to the occasion, as so often happens almost by accident. I happened to be sitting next to Dorothy that Sunday, and after her husband's 'Amen' she leaned over to me with eyes that were misty-soft and whispered, 'He's all I ever really wanted.' "

The silence that followed was broken by some clearing of throats, some involuntary shifting of gazes. Finally one listener spoke.

"Edwin West was next, wasn't he?"

And again the visible but internal shifting of directions, a prolonged pause, as though the story-teller were trying to fit pieces together which matched—but awkwardly. And when she spoke she chose words carefully, as one does in describing that which looms larger than one's own experience can explain.

"One of the impressions Canon West made upon us can be expressed, I believe, by the statement one heard about him from time to time—to the effect that when Canon West presided in the Sanctuary you knew God was *present* and *on time*.

"I remember two stories which illuminate rather opposing facets of his personality.

"Most of his ministry had been spent, as you probably know, in Canada, and in our own northwest. He arrived in Palo Alto near the beginning

of summer and that tulip tree outside was in full regalia. The Canon took one look at the tree's magnificent offering and snorted, 'I don't believe it!'—and that was that for the tulip tree. It had been dismissed.

"Another side of him, though less frequently in evidence, nevertheless prevailed from time to time. There was, for instance, that particular *Feast of Lights* pageant which Canon West took great delight and pride in directing personally—he was a talented showman and recognized the invaluable place of drama within the religious experience. But he was meticulous in all things: lines remembered perfectly, costume and makeup accuracy, and above all—starting on time.

"Finally, the moment had arrived. Actors were in place—and in his time children played the parts of the Holy Family—the choir had gathered, as had the acolyte, the crucifer, and the many others comprising the rather vast incoming procession—including, of course, Father West towering like an icy mountain over the throng.

"Suddenly there was a stirring near the front of the group. An usher shouldered his way up to Canon West and whispered. The Canon looked about him, one is tempted to say, imperiously—looking for a particular someone, in fact the mother of one of the actors—spotted her, and billowed over to her seat, bent slightly in the middle and said with a patient and almost forgiving smile, 'The Virgin Mary has to go to the bathroom—and doesn't think she can handle the—problem, with all those pillows, and things.' "

"Strange, isn't it," posed a listener, "how some stories seem to have to sit around for a while—growing fuzz, or something—while others leap at you instantly. I was thinking about Aimée Belle, who has, as long as I've known her, been an almost constant source of story material, and who remains that way today. Just recently, you know, the Missions Committee, one of our standing lay committees, proposed that the parish adopt in sponsorship fashion a Vietnamese family, and the idea was quite promptly and enthusiastically accepted—but not without some rather intense examination of alternatives—the latter approach being Aimée Belle Brenner's.

"Aimée Belle put her support behind a movement to help the people of Appalachia, and when Aimée Belle lends her support to something she brings to the contest a wide variety of weaponry, which I know from past experience is fair—but devastating. All of these notwithstanding, the pro-Vietnamese faction won the day. Sometime later I had the opportunity to discuss this event with her and somehow had the bad judgment to use the word 'lost'.

" 'Lost?' she said airily. "No. I rather think I changed my focus from an important problem to an immediate one—with a little help from my friends.' And a week later, after church it was Aimée Belle who announced in a voice that carried to the farthest corners of the garden where we had gathered that 'The people of Appalachia were struggling for a better life. The people of Vietnam, on the other hand were struggling for life itself,' and then gazed about her with a look that would and *did* forestall any further discussion of the matter."

There was a moment's pause, and then the world traveller began to sparkle.

"Thank you," she said, her voice bubbling with animation, "for that story. It cuts right across thirty years. It's that elusive something or other that we were trying to grasp earlier. The being present as we are—and *vulnerable,* and not to know for sure how deep the wound will be, and to come away feeling okay—with some help from our friends.

"Let me share one more story that seems to me to bear on this issue of our Anglican experience, and one aspect of it I call the Anglican sulk."

"Anglican sulk?" one queried.

"It comes in three degrees. The first is a characteristic and abrupt stiffening of the upper lip—a condition which does not facilitate verbal communication—discussion or compromise, and which, hopefully is a temporary state of affairs. The second and third degrees can be more serious, tend to last longer and may result in a rift, estrangement, or even a separation from one's church. It says, in effect, 'I'll show them. I'll withdraw myself from *our* church.' "

"I recognize the symptoms," said a listener. "Only it's called the First Baptist funk."

"Or the Congregational blues," laughed the third woman.

"It is, in brief, the disease of 'losing,' whether gracefully or otherwise, and its' a disease Aimée Belle has never fallen victim to. Another who knows of its pitfalls and has managed to avoid them for more than thirty years now, is Arthur Poole—"

"Dear Arthur," said the others, in unison.

"—Who has been in the thick of the action from the beginning," related the story-teller. "Arthur has so many qualities, one is lost to pick a single story that even begins to illustrate the total man. He wears that mantle of patriarchy securely, but so lightly one hardly notices. One thing is always for sure. When Arthur is around things get done, done right, and done with an evident joy. Recently, for example, a committee headed by Arthur was meeting to discuss the consecration proceedings, and an important item of the agenda was concerned with the size of the crowd and problems in maneuvering as a unit from the parish hall to the Memorial Garden, to the chapel and thence to the church proper. The difficulties seemed overwhelming and obstacles began to outnumber solutions, body temperatures were rising in direct proportion to the decrease in intellectual output—in short, minds were boggling. Arthur is uniquely equipped to handle one—or juggle several boggled minds, and he managed this situation very nicely—though precisely how escapes me. What he suggested was 'that all of us who are over 72 years of age should be comfortably seated in the chapel, and closest to the Memorial Garden. After all, it is this group who are most likely to put the thing to practical use in the near future.'—and when the uproar died down, solutions began to flow.

"I don't know that anyone has ever asked Arthur whether or not he had considered leaving St. Mark's —however much events of our rather turbulent history may have prompted such thinking. If such a question were put to him he would probably pause, weighing carefully, even politely, this impertinence, and then say—in that piquant way of his, 'The thought has crossed my mind once or twice. Ahh, but then, so has bank robbery. And as you see. I am still here.' "

The man was at least a decade older than his time on this earth. Fear, guilt, failure, and above all, anger had each of them added to the sum while subtracting from a life.

"Hope," said Colin, "as we have come to know it here," and he signalled with a characteristic circular motion the small universe of St. Mark's, "was in deadly contest with despair. And on our part, we needed his continuing service as sexton. So it happened."

So it happened.

I remember our first meeting well. He was part of my new job here, and had been a member of the staff for some time before my arrival. I remember outlining for him what it was we expected—and perhaps I overemphasized that there was much more to be done than he, or any other individual could be expected to do—and at that point he interrupted with an angry outburst having something to do with people giving everything to the churches when there was so much need elsewhere.

"What is it people give to churches, anyway?" he had demanded—and I suppose I just stood there for a moment. It's not a question I'm often asked. Somehow, for most of us, the *why's* of giving are more important than the *what's*. Yet it is a valid question, and I tried to answer him.

Objects, things of value, money; presence—simply being there in the nave on Sunday morning, simply being on a standing committee, or serving a stewardship as an acolyte or a senior warden, and these are rarely simple matters of themselves; *love* and this in many forms: time, energy, joy, talent, devotion, pain. I believe that each of us sets out to give something he owns and ends up giving that which he dared not dream of possessing—which may be a bit preachy.

"Love?" snorted our sexton. 'D'ya mean lovey-love or churchy-love?"

"Both," I assured him.

Over the next two years we experienced a selective interpretation of this conversation.

Beds of flowers sprang up in totally unexpected places while shrubs whose presence offended no one but our sexton simply disappeared.

Floors suffered and windows tended toward the opaque, but our grounds became dotted with great concrete urns which he molded himself—some for flowers, others for his arch-enemy, the smoldering cigarette butt.

And when he left, as he termed it, "to die without so many darn bosses around," he took with him in marriage a woman he had met during this period. And I have every good reason to believe it was lovey-love.