St Laurence Episcopal History

(1977-2010)

In the fall of 1977 a life long Episcopalian living near Conifer, Mary Frances Young, wished for a near-by church. She was sure there were other communicants in the area, so she simply wrote to the Diocesan Center and asked how to organize a Mission. With no support she rented a room at the Hi-Lander Restaurant in Conifer and placed notices in the local newspapers inviting Episcopalians to a meeting on Nov. 28, 1977. There was and enthusiastic turnout, including the Rev. Robert Reddish, Jr. an Episcopal Priest who had retired from his pastoral duties. Father Reddish was invited to celebrate the Eucharist. The group met in each others homes until Jan. 1978 when they started meeting at the Pleasant Park Grange.

The Grange hall was in a beautiful mountain setting, but it was a Spartan facility. It had no plumbing, little space for Sunday School, and members took turns coming in early to bring wood to fire up the two wood stoves that supplied heat to the building. In the summer services were held outdoors in an area beside the building.

In May of 1979 the Bishop organized the mission of the Diocese of Colorado and appointed Fr. Reddish as Vicar. A Bishop's Committee was formed with Mary Frances Young as the first Warden. In June the Bishop christened the Conifer Mission as Brother Lawrence Episcopal Mission. Brother Lawrence was a French Roman Catholic

Carmelite monk who in 1649 entered the monastery in Paris where he was given charge of the kitchen. His writings recommend a very elevated form of prayer consisting of the simple practice of the presence of God, whether by the imagination or the intellect.

In August 1980 Fr. Reddish resigned as Vicar to continue his writing career. In March of 1981 Fr. Larry Donoghue became Vicar. As the Mission continued to grow the need for a larger building prompted a move of the Mission to the VFW Post further west, near Shaffer's Crossing. This new location was a great help to the Mission, with indoor plumbing, central heating, and room for Sunday School in the same building. At this point the Mission really began to grow with the start of a youth and an adult choir, and two weekday study groups.

In November of 1981, the members of the congregation voted unanimously to change the name of the Mission from Brother Lawrence to St. Laurence. It was thought that Brother Lawrence was too confusing a name, since people are not used to thinking of a church as "Brother". And St Laurence is another person after whom it is appropriate to name the Mission. Laurence was a Deacon of the Church. On August 4, 258, Pope Sixtus the Second and his seven Deacons were apprehended in the Roman catacombs. They were all executed except for the Archdeacon Laurence. The tradition is that the Prefect demanded information from Laurence about the Church's treasures. Laurence, in reply, assembled the sick and poor to whom he had distributed the Church's relief fund and presented them to the Prefect, saying, "These are the treasures of the Church."

Laurence is believed to have been roasted alive on a gridiron. St Laurence's feast day is August 10.

In late 1981, in an article released to the local newspaper, St Laurence described itself to the community as…"The purpose of St. Laurence's Episcopal Mission is to assist the people of the community to find a meaningful union with God and all other people. We accomplish this by gathering on a regular basis to worship, study, and partake of Holy Communion and to share the company of fellow Christians. Our faith and worship are based on reason, tradition and an intelligent interpretation of the Bible. We seek to fulfill the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of the people of our community and to bring them into the knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In October of 1980, less than two years from the initial formative meeting, the Mission held a rummage sale. The $394 profit was used to buy Thanksgiving dinners for deserving families in the community. This was the genesis of a rich tradition of a strong commitment to community outreach that has continued to today. During the 80's an Outreach Committee was formed that met with community members in need and provided food and monetary assistance from their homes. Outreach has evolved where today community members in need are referred to our Outreach volunteers for visits to our food pantry and wood pile by the Mountain Resource Center (MRC). Funds are donated monthly to the MRC with restrictions that they be used solely to assist deserving mountain families in need. Outreach volunteers coordinate the efforts of other churches,

service organizations, the MRC, local businesses and donors to provide hundreds of Holiday food baskets and gifts.

In time the Mission moved back to the Hi-Lander Restaurant and later to Jackie's Aerobic Movement Center in Aspen Park. In early July, 1983 the Mission purchased 10 acres of land for the building site for a church. The first celebration of Holy Eucharist was held on the site on July 3. Another celebration was held on Wednesday, Aug. 10, the feast of St. Laurence, which was followed by a pot luck featuring a roasted pig.

The land did not have access off Hwy. 285 or Barclay Road, so the next couple years were spent paying for the land, arranging for access, and developing the design for the new church. In 1986 five members of the congregation purchased a house on Scott Road and granted the Mission license to build an access driveway to the building site. On September 14, 1986, the Feast of the Holy Cross, ground was broken for the building. Brewster Caesar, an original member of the Mission, designed, and as the general contractor, built the building. On June 7, 1987, the Feast of Pentecost, the building was consecrated.

In May 1999, Fr. Donoghue announced his retirement. Following an extensive search, the Rev Dorothy Lee accepted the position of Vicar of St. Laurence. Her tenure began in January 2000.

In January 2003, Rev. Lee left as Vicar to pursue other activities within the Diocese.

In February 2003, Fr. Phil Mason became our regular supply priest, and March accepted the position of Priest –In-Charge. In August 2003, Fr. Phil was called by the Bishop's Committee to be our full time Vicar.

In October 2003 St. Laurence Mission became St. Laurence Parish, completing a long journey too fully independent status.

In 2005 Fr. Phil and a small group of parishioners, with input from many others, wrote the existing Mission Statement.

The St. Laurence Mission Statement

In the name of Christ

St. Laurence is a community of Anglican worship and education.

We are a sanctuary for all who seek spiritual growth.

We are stewards if God's gifts.

We actively serve those in need.

We work for justice and peace among all people,

and respect the dignity of every human being.

All find a welcome.

In 2006, Fr. Phil announced his intention to retire as Rector at the end of August, 2009. In 2009 the Vestry called the Rev. Nina Churchman to serve as Interim Rector and guide us into the selection process for a new Rector, and to fully explore our identity in that process. In March 2010, Rev. Nina's role changed, as she formally became Priest-In-Charge which extended the time frame for the selection process.

Over the past 32 years St. Laurence has been blessed with dedicated, hard working people with creative talents and a desire to make worship happen and fulfill it's commitment to the community, no matter what the obstacles.

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