

Canon Smith (33)
TAPE GUIDE (Written document)

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No. 53
11/1/8

Oakville, Ontario
May 1975

It will be thirty years next November since I took up my duties as Rector of St. Thomas' Church, Belleville, following the fourteen-year ministry of the Rev. Beauchamp Payne. It is a great pleasure to reminisce about those years for they were crucial ones for me, having recently been discharged from the Canadian Army Chaplain Corp after about six years of it, and finding the return to parish life not unaccompanied by a sense of strain. It was the wonderful welcome and eager co-operation of the people of St. Thomas's that soon dispelled this feeling.

At that time the Church and Rectory were undergoing renovations and repairs. The foundations of the Church had been found to be insecure so while these defects were being set right services were held in the Parish Hall for a few weeks. From a large single dwelling the Rectory had been divided into three, the ground floor for the Rector and his family, with two apartments upstairs for rental. My good mother occupied one of them for a number of years and Mr. and Mrs. Harry Alford the other, a most happy and congenial arrangement. The exterior of the whole house had been changed from a rather drab slate color to a somewhat startling light yellow with blue trim.

These were costly operations. A good deal of the needed money was realized from the sale of half the Rectory lot on the corner of Bridge and Church Streets to the Bell Telephone Company. Not long after our arrival, and somewhat to our dismay, we watched the erection of the company's fine stone headquarters building not fifteen feet from our bedroom window.

Other Church of England properties in the city were also sold

about this time and the proceeds capitalized. The title to these lots and houses went back nearly one hundred and twenty years to the days of the Clergy Reserves. St. Thomas' Church shared in the compensation which the Church of England received from the government of Upper Canada when claim to the Reserves was relinquished. But there was still some real estate held in the name of "the Belleville Rectory", namely St. Thomas' Church. Later the flourishing parish of Christ Church came into being and in due course this congregation very naturally laid claim to a share in the income from the Belleville Rectory. The claim was denied by the authorities of St. Thomas's and, the dispute growing acrimonious, it was settled in court by a judgement to the effect that St. Thomas' should always receive the first three thousand dollars per year from the endowment and any excess should be divided between Church of England parishes in Belleville and the township of Thurlow. The only other Church of England group in Thurlow were members of St. Paul's, Roslin (incidentally my first parish) and it was thought for a time that they might share modestly in the Belleville Rectory income. However it was pointed out that the actual church building of St. Paul's was situated on the north **side of the boundary** road between Thurlow and Huntingdon and that made its people ineligible for endowment income. In any case, as I recall, the endowment never did exceed three thousand dollars a year.

My wife, Marjorie, and two of our children were made to feel at home in the Rectory. Our eldest son, Peter, was pursuing his musical education in New York. Patricia attended Belleville Collegiate and later graduated from Trinity College, Toronto. She is now Mrs. W.B. Harris, of Toronto. David attended Trinity College School, Port Hope,

Royal Roads and Trinity College. He is now Rector of St. Brice's Church, North Bay, and Archdeacon of Muskoka. Toward the end of our first year in St. Thomas' Rectory our second daughter, Harriet, was born, a wholely welcome though somewhat stunning surprise. She is now Mrs. D.B. Pattison of Aurora.

I remember vividly this incident from those early days. We were seated at dinner one evening when the door-bell rang. I answered and there stood a small character resplendent in full Wolf Cub uniform and cherubic of countenance.

"Please, sir," he said, "may I use your telephone?" Very polite and unhurried.

"Why, yes," I said, "but there's one in the Parish Hall, you know."

"Yes, I know," he said, "but I thought I had better use yours."

"Alright," I agreed, "I suppose you want to call your mother."

"No," he replied, "I thought I'd like to call the fire department."

"Why." I asked, "would you like to do that?"

"Because," he answered cheerfully, "the Parish Hall is on fire!"

It was too. The Cub was promptly relieved of further responsibility, the Belleville Fire Department responded immediately and did a good job on the flames. So did the Insurance Adjuster later on. The Parish Hall benefited greatly by his generous assessment of damages.

In early days St. Thomas' acquired a reputation for being "High Church". Why, I never quite knew, though I expect the tradition goes back to Canon Burke's day who, so it was said, liked to be called Father Burke (doubtless deservedly). However in my time we were comparatively plain in our worship, no eucharistic vestments, no copes,

no elaborate ceremonial and a minimum of candle power. But always there was a genuine spirit of reverence and sincere worship.

The Choir was not strong numerically but the quality was high. This was due to the training of Professor Ernest Wheatly, the Organist and Choir Master for many years. He was universally addressed as "professor", not I think primarily because of academic standing or because he had originally come from England to be tutor in music at St. Agnes' School where he was very highly regarded (my late sister had been one of his pupils there) but because of his unfailing dignity and upright carriage, his Christian integrity and of course, his surpassing musical talent. He gathered about him a splendid group of singers, some quite young, who produced choral leadership for our Services of great excellence. I cannot recall all their names but I venture to mention Miss B.J. Houston (now Mrs. Newman) a song-bird lovely to listen to, the Bankier boys, the Watkin brothers....O, it is a mistake to name names for unforgiveable omissions are bound to occur, but I have to say that my debt to Ernest Wheatley, Mrs. Wheatley and St. Thomas's Choir is a lasting one. I wonder if some of them remember the Sunday afternoon we represented Ontario in an Evensong over a Toronto radio station, broadcast from St. Thomas'.

There were of course the three traditional Services each Sunday. Odd things sometimes happened. One of the servers at the eight o'clock Eucharist was Robert Holway (son of "Bouncer" of hockey fame). He was a big boy and sometimes, though always faithful, arrived on his bicycle in breathless haste, and of course, breakfastless. On two or three occasions while kneeling beside me at the altar he keeled over in a dead faint. He was too big for me to carry out so he was revived

within the sanctuary. What better place for resuscitation?

One morning a bat (doubtless from the belfry) flew wildly about. A bat is not usually associated with heavenly aspirations (in fact the contrary is the case) and ladies present grew restless. Strangely enough this wheeling and diving bat eventually came to rest on the floor just at the end of a pew. With a quick stab of his foot Mr. Percy Geen put the intruder out of action.

There was an eccentric elderly lady who ran a small grocery store on Bridge St. West. During the war St. Thomas' fell into debt in a modest way and in order to meet some current expenses and to consolidate the indebtedness a loan to the Church had been arranged with this lady, and though there was annual interest to be paid, there was a definite understanding that by the terms of her will the debt should be cancelled at her death. I well remember delivering the cheque for the interest and watching her carefully deposit it in a money-bag she carried around her waist. Eventually she became ill and passed away in the Belleville Hospital. Mr. Robert Pringle, a former Churchwarden whom many will remember with great affection and respect, was our legal adviser and so took charge in this affair. Imagine our dismay when it was discovered that on her death-bed our "benefactress" had made a new will in which St. Thomas' was not mentioned. The Churchwardens, as trust officers for the congregation and on Mr. Pringle's advice, felt compelled to contest in court the validity of this second will, distasteful though such action might be. This was done. His Honor Judge Urquhart from Toronto presided at the hearing. Our "star" witness was a local doctor of the highest Canadian and European qualifications, and a staunch Roman Catholic. The worthy Judge, who seemed to feel it

necessary to inquire into the religious affiliations of each witness, addressed this famous doctor as he stood in the box and said, "Of course, doctor, you're an Anglican and a member of St. Thomas'." The vigorous, almost scornful, and wholly emphatic denial of any such outrageous suggestion rang from the doctor's lips throughout the courtroom. Even Judge Urqhart blenched. I later learned he himself was an Anglican, a "low" churchman. Am I wicked in imagining that ~~it~~ was this confrontation that helped the judge to a decision unfavourable to our cause despite the very great weight of convincing testimony Mr. Pringle presented? Anyway he, Bob Pringle, was so incensed at the judgement that he entered an appeal and engaged the services of the famous Toronto lawyer, Mr. J.J. Robinette, to present ^{it}. This formidable action eventually resulted in a ²out-of-court settlement satisfactory enough.

About 1948 or 1949 Archbishop John Lyons saw fit to appoint me "Archdeacon of Ontario". This somewhat grandiloquent title has a long history. Archdeacon Beamish held it for many years, as did Bishop Lyons in his time. Archdeacon McCommnell, a life-long friend, who succeeded the Rev. William Robinson, now Bishop of Ottawa, as Rector was similarly honoured. Readers should not confuse the Anglican Diocese of Ontario with the Province. The diocese consists only of the six counties that lie between Trenton on the West and Cardinal on the East. Kingston is the cathedral city and the Bishop's headquarters. The diocese took the name "Ontario" before Upper Canada changed its name in 1867 and has steadfastly clung to it ever since despite the mild confusion involved.

I like to tell a trifling but amusing tale in connection with my

own appointment. Among my favourite diversions was duck-hunting and as all hunters know The Bay of Quinte is (or was) the ideal area for it. One day good old friends and avid hunters Ack Ketcheson (executive head of our local Income Tax Department) and Fred Deacon (senior partner of the well-known manufacturing firm of Deacon Brothers) phoned an invitation to accompany them for an evening shoot across the Bay. We stopped the car to secure a guide with his half-ton truck at a farm belonging to a splendid young farmer named Thompson, as I remember. Now a clerical collar and a shot-gun do not go well together so that in point of attire I was indistinguishable from the other members of the party. It was arranged that I should ride in the cab of the truck with Thompson while Fred and Ack climbed in to the back. As we drove down the lane to the marsh many whimsical remarks were heard from the rear anent the "Archdeacon" riding up front, while at the same time I was regaled with a string of war-time reminiscences from veteran Thompson, all interlarded with frequent appeals and references to the First and Second Persons of the Deity. Six years in military circles had tuned my ears to these modes of expression and it did not occur to me to protest. We had our shoot and the same circumstances prevailed on the return journey to the farmhouse where Mrs. Thompson had agreed to dress our trophies. Again I was introduced as the Archdeacon. Finally ex-gunner Thompson said to me in a puzzled way, "Say, where do you come in the Deacon firm? I know Fred here, and John, but I never heard of Arch." With a stumbling apology for not identifying myself sooner I said, "Archdeacon is a church term...I'm the rector of St. Thomas' Church." Momentarily there was a stunned silence and then a final and desperate appeal to the Deity. Mirth, unrestrained,

convulsed both Ack and Fred.

The Rev. Henry Hill, now the honoured Bishop of the Diocese, came as assistant curate to St. Thomas' and we had a happy and profitable association for a whole year. Henry had put in some time the previous summer as student assistant at Christ Church so was well-known and very popular in that Parish. The Rector, the Rev. Grant Sparling, good neighbour and personal friend to me, had a part-time assistant in the Rev. Everett Smith, in deacon's orders, a first-rate minister, highly regarded by all and thoroughly dedicated to the interests of Christ Church. He regarded the appointment of the Rev. Henry to St. Thomas' with some misgiving, fearing that the delicate balance between the two parishes might be upset and that some families might be drawn away from his beloved Christ Church. One day in the hospital hall he tackled me about it. "You've got Henry Hill over there," he said, "Please see that he doesn't extend his ministry to our side of the river". "Everett," I said, "that's a deal. We'll make the Moira River the boundary between the two parishes". Since a goodly portion of Christ Church people lived on the East (or our side) of the Moira I heard no more from the Rev. Everett on this matter.

Mr. and Mrs. George Gorman lived on William St. in a pleasant home. George had been on the staff on the Intelligence^{or} for many years. He and his wife, Maud, had been the soul of hospitality to Marjorie and me especially on Sunday evenings when the day's work was done and we could relax. When Maud died rather suddenly George was desolate. It so happened that Archbishop Lyons was at the Rectory the day before the funeral and since he knew George well from the days of his own incumbency at St. Thomas' he asked to see him. George was pleased with

the Archbishop's call and remarked, "People have been terribly kind to me...I never knew I had so many friends until Maud died". To which the Archbishop replied, "Do you know, George, how it is that a man has many friends?" "How's that, your Grace?" asked George (that is how archbishops were addressed in those days) "By being one," said the Archbishop. No truer word was ever spoken.

The Parish Council met regularly and at a certain meeting it was decided that the interior of the church was in sore need of re-decorating. After considering several expensive tenders the work was assigned to Brown Brothers of Willowdale. Mr. Brown did a quite acceptable job on the chancel, both ceiling and east wall, and on the walls of the nave. Then one day when nobody was watching he exercised his artistic tastes and produced on the wall space above the pulpit a more than life-sized figure of what he thought St. Thomas might have looked like, complete with carpenter's square the symbol of the saint's martyrdom, and on the corresponding space ~~over~~ the organ console a figure in vivid colours he said was that of St. George...to suggest our affiliation with the mother Church of England, of course. These paintings, though not without artistic merit, were regarded by some with qualified approval. It was reported to me that a certain gentleman stood for a long time contemplating the figure of St. George and then was heard to murmur audibly, "Well, well, that's the first time I ever knew Joan of Arc was a saint of the Church of England!" Since then both figures have been obliterated, I rather think in Archdeacon McConnell's time. He and his wife Ruby have been ^{among} our bosom friends since college days. He cannot in any circumstances be suspected of being other than a dedicated ^(as well as a dedicated servant of God) Irishman. I fancy that if the painting of St. George had been that of

St. Patrick it would have been there yet...or until the tragic fire!

Baptisms, weddings, funerals followed on another irregularly but inexorably. I relished the two former duties but sadly deplored the latter, knowing full well that it is in that ultimate crisis that one's ministry faces its sternest test. One Sunday afternoon a young mother brought two lovely twins for baptism accompanied by a large coterie of relatives and friends. These beautiful children were no longer babes-in-arms but had reached the walking stage, and so were set down on the floor among the group gathered about the font. Came time in the Service for the actual naming and affusion of water and the "candidates" had mysteriously disappeared. No one had noticed their departure. We turned ourselves into a general search party and in time the twins were dragged, reluctant, from under the front pew. Relief all round!

Weddings were not always (for me) an unmixed blessing, though as I say I joined heartily in the happiness of the bride's great day. The custom at St. Thomas' was that almost invariably the Rector should propose the toast to the Bride at the reception. There were perhaps fifteen or twenty weddings in a year and it is fair to say that the same guests attended at least half of them. It was almost impossible to say something when the toast to the bride was called for, that they hadn't all heard before. I used to search out my wife on Saturday at noon and plead with her to suggest a theme for the toast of the afternoon that I hadn't already worn to shreds. And in this, as in all other respects, she never failed me.

Finally the story of the grandfather clock. A certain Dr. Cliff from Montreal made ^a nation-wide reputation in the field of spiritual

healing through the power of Prayer. It was suggested that he be invited to St. Thomas'; which was done. He accepted and in the course of three evening "Services" made a very profound impression. The Church was jammed and on the third night we extended the audition to the Parish House which was also full. Dr. Cliff stressed the practicality of faith in God, and vivid indeed were his illustrations of the effectiveness of prayer. One of them concerned the procuring of a pressure cooker through concerted prayer for an imp^eunious Vicar's wife in England. There were many other stories of a similar nature. Now my theological training, and personal experience, had taught me that asking for material blessings was only a part of prayer and I felt that Dr. Cliff had overplayed this angle. So the following Sunday before a full congregation I paid tribute to Dr. Cliff's message, insisted that he had said many true and very helpful things, but warned that if the chief impression he had left was to the effect that prayer consisted mainly in asking for things many listeners would be disappointed. Sometimes God says "no". "For instance," I said, off the cuff as it were, "I have always wanted a grandfather clock. But I never expect to have one and certainly do not intend to pray for it." After the Service Churchwarden Archie Lewis, who with his family had been deeply moved by Dr. Cliff and who was universally regarded as a Christian gentleman of loveable qualities, came striding into my Ventry and burst out, "Arthur, you certainly succeeded in spoiling the whole Mission...knocked the stilts out from under everything that Dr. Cliff said". Against this attack I vehemently protested. So we stood, eyeball to eyeball, each holding his ground, much more in sorrow than in anger.

Some months later I announced my retirement from St. Thomas' and my appointment to a Toronto Parish. On the last Sunday evening, May 1953, Archie Lewis suggested to Marjorie and me that we attend at the Parish House (I should have remembered sooner that we used the term House rather than Hall). We went over and to our astonishment most of our people were there...and I noticed that the stage curtains had been carefully closed. Archie made a very apt and much too complimentary speech, and then the curtains were opened. There stood the most gorgeous grandfather clock, new, glittering and eloquent...and bearing a brass plate with an inscription describing it in suitable terms as a parting gift from St. Thomas' congregation to the Rector and his wife. I tried, and failed, to express our gratitude. The ceremony was scarcely over before Archie approached, pressed his forefinger against the top button of my waistcoat and said firmly, "See...remember what I said that day in the Vestry?...Faithless!" "Well, Archie," I choked, "Never think that we are not eternally grateful for the beautiful clock. But I swear I never prayed for it!" The clock hasn't missed a tick ~~for~~ *a chime* these twenty-two years.

Our parish organizations were very active and productive, much of their success being due to the excellent quality of leadership. I remember with gratitude Mrs. Helen Ketcheson, most able President of the Ladies Guild, as was also in her turn as president Mrs. Virginia Lewis. Mrs. Stanley Morton was an outstanding leader of the W.A. and there were many others. Leaders are ineffective without good followers and St. Thomas' was blessed with both.

The more I write the more recollections come rushing in upon me.

I have not even mentioned St. Paul's Mission south of Dundas St. nor the warmth[^] of our admiration and friendship for Mrs. Marjorie McKenna and her household. (She once prepared Christmas dinner for over twenty members of ^{her} own family, old and young, and ~~then~~ another dinner on the same day for her old Father and Mother, Mr. and Mrs. Bunnett, just up the street where there were another eighteen guests!)

But I must bring these wandering reminiscences to a close. St. Thomas' will rise again. The power of its influence for good upon the community during its long history cannot be lost but must continue and grow in strength. By God's grace so it will, and I pray that it may be so.

Arthur Smith
Oakville
May 1975