

History of CHRIST CHURCH Dover



Schedule of Services

<i>Sundays —</i>	<i>8:00 a.m. Holy Communion</i>
	<i>10:00 a.m. Family Service</i>
<i>Wednesdays —</i>	<i>9:30 a.m. Holy Communion</i>
<i>Holy Days —</i>	<i>5:30 p.m. Holy Communion</i>

South State & Water Streets
Dover, Delaware 19901
Parish Office 734-5731

Printed May 1985

On August 30, 1703, twenty-two Kent County residents signed a petition to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, London, England, requesting the ministry of a priest. In the following year, the Reverend Thomas Crawford, the first of nine S.P.G. missionaries, arrived. At the same time, Colonel Robert French of New Castle provided a glebe farm of approximately 110 acres southeast of the present city of Dover. Within three years, a wooden church had been built on an adjacent tract.

When Dover was formally laid out by William Penn's surveyors in 1717, two religious squares were designated. Meeting House Square, the site of the Delaware State Museum, was reserved for Dissenters (Presbyterians) and Church Square, east of Water Street, was reserved for the Establishment (Episcopalians). The original Church Square was southwest of the present square, but was relocated at its current site in 1734. The central portion of the present church building was begun on the new square that same year.

The original structure had a simple, rectangular, meeting-house design. Approaching the church from Water Street, one had to walk around to the south side and enter through a door mid-way in the south wall. The entrance opened under the long side of an L-shaped balcony, which ran along both the south and west walls. A raised pulpit stood on the north wall; a simple communion table was at the east end. The addition of the current west porch provided an office for the parish clerk and a meeting place for the vestry.

When Charles Inglis, who later became Rector of Trinity Church, New York City, and then Bishop of Nova Scotia, arrived in 1759, he found an unfinished church with no windows or doors. Inglis, however, soon corrected the situation. Under his leadership, the parish grew rapidly. Many were baptized and evangelical outreach ministry was extended among both blacks and whites.

After Inglis left for New York in 1764, his protegee, Samuel Magaw, took charge of the parish. While not as famous as Parson Sydenham Thorne of Milford, he was sympathetic to the Revolutionary cause. Among his notable parishioners was Caesar Rodney, who served on the vestry. During Magaw's tenure, the parish received several major gifts which still survive. Benjamin Wynkoop of Philadelphia presented a handsome Lectern Bible, and his sister, Esther Wynkoop of Dover, presented a silver chalice and paten, which are still used occasionally in parish services.

The post-Revolutionary period was a time of trouble for the Episcopal Church throughout the newly independent country, established without the support of most Episcopal clergy and many lay people. Some had left by preference; others were driven out by force. The withdrawal of S.P.G. support coupled with the evacuation of most clergy left Delaware's parishes with few means and little spiritual leadership. The proximity to the "cradle of Methodism" left a crippled church vulnerable to the enthusiasm of the Methodists.

These factors led to the most depressed period in the history of Christ Church, characterized by general inactivity and very short clergy tenure. From 1833 to 1859, the parish had no deputies at Diocesan Conventions. The church and church yard were neglected. When the first Bishop of Delaware, Alfred Lee, was invited to Christ Church in the 1840's, he wrote that he had heard that the church had become a refuge for snakes and other animals. As a result, he hoped that services could be held at the State House or at some other appropriate building.

However, as the nation moved toward civil war, Christ Church began to revive. In the mid-1840's, Mary Brereton Ridgely had the Wynkoop communion silver repaired, as it had been damaged in an early nineteenth-century fire which had destroyed many valuable parish records. Under Bishop Lee's inspiration, the parish began to regain its former position in Dover and in the diocese.

In the late 1860's, a major renovation of the building was undertaken with a modern reorganization of the parish. Mrs. Charles I. (Ann Ridgely) du Pont, who had grown up in the parish, provided generous support, which was carried out by her daughter, Mrs. Eugene (Amelia Elizabeth) du Pont. The combined efforts of the bishop, the parish, and the friends of the parish culminated on Ascension Day, 1860, when the church was formally reconsecrated.

The post-Civil War period was one of expansion in the church. Christ Church was one of several downstate parishes to acquire the architectural marks of the Oxford Movement. Interesting neo-Gothic windows replaced the earlier clear glass; a neo-Gothic chancel with choir was added to the east end; and candlesticks were placed in the sanctuary where few or none had been before.

Some of the neo-Gothic details have since disappeared. However, against the background of a simple eighteenth-century meeting house, nineteenth-century windows remind the worshipper of the past. One early window recalls the common literal commitment to the Second Commandment once shared by Christians, Jews, and Mohammedans alike. There is no anthropomorphic or human representation except a, then, very daring symbol of the Holy Spirit. Another early window recalls some of the humor of the Medieval Period which we have lost. The subject is the feeding of the five thousand. In traditional fashion, it is a memorial to a substantial citizen. The person commemorated is James Washington Robbins, the founder of the Richardson and Robbins Company, a food-processing plant and Dover's first major modern industry. The windows at the west end of the nave are in the style of Louis Tiffany.

In the early twentieth century, Christ Church was expanded further with a new sanctuary, other auxiliary areas for the church building, and the present church yard wall and lytch gate.

After World War II, William H. Thompson, a Philadelphia architect and son of a former rector, supervised the building of the present Parish House and a major remodeling of the church. Major gifts in memory of members of the Richardson, Ridgely, and Wolcott families helped to provide the current interior furnishings, the fine organ, and the expanded seating. In the late 1960's, the work was concluded with important, but largely invisible, upgrading of the fabric of the church.



Christ Church Clergy

Thomas Crawford	1704-1710
Jacob Henderson	1710-1711
George Frazer	1733-1735
Arthur Ussher	1738-1745
Theophilus Morris	1745
Thomas Bluett	1748-1749
Hugh Neill	1750-1756
Charles Inglis	1759-1764
Samuel Magaw	1764-1781
Samuel Roe	1786-1791
George Dashiell	1794
Walter C. Gardner	1799
Henry Judah	1818-1819
C.F. Cruse	1824
Robert Piggott	1830-1833
Daniel Higbee	1833-1835
H.T. McCallum	1836-1837
S.T. Carpenter	1850-1856
Marshall B. Smith	1859-1860
John Crocker White	1860-1863
T. Gardner Littell	1865-1866
Lucius Sweetland	1867
Edward H. True	1868-1869
James W. Hoskins	1870-1871
Samuel McElwee	1871-1873
Lewis W. Gibson	1873-1894
George M. Bond	1895-1907
Henry Olmstead	1907-1910
Benjamin F. Thompson	1910-1939
Paul A. Kellogg	1940-1959
G.P. Mellick Belshaw	1960-1966
Gregory M. Howe	1966