



Christ Church Looks Back

by Joseph A. Tomberlin

Readers should recall that the September 2009 issue of *The Vineyard* launched a series of articles that went on in the following three issues and described efforts by Christ Church's Vestry to acquire a loan from the American Church Building Fund Commission for construction of Sunday School rooms. As the continuing narrative related, Bishop Middleton S. Barnwell encouraged the Vestry to approach the A.C.B.F.C. about a loan, wrote a letter to the Commission endorsing Christ Church's loan request, and signed the formal loan application to indicate his approval. Nevertheless, when A.C.B.F.C. approved the application, according to Vestry Clerk Robert G. Macks, Bishop Barnwell "did not look with any particular favor on our desire to effect a loan through [A.C.B.F.C.] . . . and felt we should strengthen our financial position before attempting any further expansion. Why did the Bishop change his mind? Finding an answer nearly sixty years later is very difficult, but part of the explanation lies in certain aspects of the relationship of the Vicar, Fr. Clifton White, with members of Christ Church's Vestry and with Bishop Barnwell.

Clifton Huntington White and Dorothy White arrived in Valdosta in the fall of 1941, and he began teaching at Georgia State Woman's College, now Valdosta State

University. Their names appear in the Parish Register in 1941, but their actual transfer of membership from the Cathedral of St. Philip's in Atlanta did not occur until September 26, 1942. At the time, Raimundo de Orès, Dean of the Cathedral, wrote to the then Vicar, Thomas G. Mundy: "Although Clifton and Dorothy White have been gone for over a year I still miss them dreadfully. They both did excellent work in the Cathedral—they are dependable and capable of leadership. I hope you are using them to their fullest capacity and enjoying them as much as we did at the Cathedral." Mr. White quickly became involved at Christ Church, and his name first appeared in the Minutes as a vestryman and acting Clerk of Vestry in 1942.

The parish records provide no traces whatever of Mr. White's subsequent training for the priesthood while still teaching full time at G.S.W.C. What is certain is that the Vestry, in its session of March 4, 1945, recommended him for ordination in the diaconate, and all vestrymen signed the recommendation form. The Vestry also "instructed" Fr. Mundy to purchase a surplice and a stole for Mr. White at the cost of forty dollars. White was then ordained as transitional deacon on April 29, 1945, and as priest on March 16, 1946. On June 26, 1946, he officially succeeded Fr. Mundy as the Vicar of Christ Church, according to the Parish Register.

The details of this sudden transition are almost completely lost in the mists and shadows of history. The Vestry Minutes of April 26, 1946, still show Thomas G. Mundy as the Vicar. The Minutes of a called Vestry meeting on June 24, 1946, two days before the succession was official, already refer to Fr. White as Vicar. No explanation exists of Fr. Mundy's resignation or removal, whichever it was, and, inexplicably, no Minutes exist for the May 1946 Vestry meeting. However, there are two relevant clues, one before the fact and one after the fact.

The first item speaks to tension between Fr. Mundy and the Vestry as early as the fall of 1942. An entry in the Vestry Minutes of October 18, 1942, states, "A motion regarding symbolism in the Church was not seconded or acted upon, as it was ruled out of order by the Vicar, inasmuch as service order is the business of the priest and not the Vestry." The second is in a letter from Fr. White to the Vestry, dated July 13, 1952, in which he makes unmistakable his attitude toward an unofficial meeting or "caucus" of vestrymen that occurred after the adjournment of the July 1952 Vestry meeting and to which White was not invited. He wrote, "I can recall another "caucus" some years ago which led to the removal of your then Vicar; some of you remember it also. . . ." The only vicar to leave Christ Church in Fr. White's time was Fr. Mundy, so his reference was unquestionably to Mundy.

More of this story is to come in the March *Vineyard*.