



# Christ Church Looks Back

by Joseph A. Tomberlin

Our story continues with a called Vestry meeting on the evening of May 16, 1952, from which only Jerome Tillman was absent. Senior Warden Glen Robinson began by reading to the Vestry recent letters he exchanged with Bishop Barnwell that related to Vicar Clifton H. White's being called by a North Carolina parish. He read also correspondence between Mr. White and the Bishop. Extended discussion followed and focused upon Christ Church's "financial capacity" and "the authority of the Vestry to commit itself for future action. . . ."

James D. Carroll then presented a motion requiring, first, that between September 1, 1952, and September 1, 1954, Mr. White, still a full-time faculty member at Valdosta State College, would drop his entire teaching load and end his V.S.C. work. In return for White's phasing out his academic position, the Vestry would increase his salary as Vicar by \$1,733 in 1952, \$867 in 1953, and \$1,300 in 1954. Second, the motion provided for improvements to the "Rectory," including construction of a downstairs bathroom, to begin by September 1, 1952. Third, the Vestry was to call Mr. White as Rector of Christ Church, "subject to approval of Ecclesiastical Authority (Canon 22)." Robert G. Macks seconded the complex motion, which received unanimous approval. Immediately afterward, Senior Warden Robinson moved that the Vestry "extend at

this time a call as Rector of Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta, to Rev. Clifton H. White, subject to the approval of Ecclesiastical Authority (Canon 22)." Seconded by D.C. Roddey, the motion passed unanimously.

Though his letter no longer exists in Christ Church's records, Mr. Robinson quickly informed Bishop Barnwell in writing of the Vestry's momentous actions, as the Bishop confirmed in his return letter of May 20, 1952. He made clear that "some difficulties" existed with the Vestry's actions, and the first was that Christ Church could not call Mr. White as Rector because of its status as a mission of the Diocese of Georgia. Mr. White could not be Rector until Christ Church became a parish, and that was possible only by an act of the Diocesan Convention.

He also wrote, "I am going along with you on your financial program as outlined and I feel sure you can meet the new obligations you are assuming. You are, however, taking on a pretty heavy increase for the next three years and I'm wondering if you are doing this on faith or if you know where the money is coming from." The Bishop said that if the Vestry were certain it could carry its new financial commitments and made "proper application," he was confident the next convention would approve parish status for Christ Church. At that point, he asserted, "you can satisfy Clifton about being a 'rector.' You should

bear in mind, however, that when you get him as a 'rector' you will have him permanently. . . . [Once] he becomes head of the parish I will have no further control over him." Finally, Bishop Barnwell added, "I think Clifton is turning out all right but it would not be fatal if he accepted a call to North Carolina, as I feel sure I can find some good man to put into Valdosta."

The Bishop's letter caused consternation among some vestrymen, who, at their next meeting on June 1, 1952, displayed reluctance about the motions they had approved on May 16. Discussion resumed about the salary increases promised to the Vicar. Both Mr. Fry and Dr. Perry expressed the opinion that keeping the salary pledge was impossible "under present circumstances." Mr. White agreed that the financial situation was difficult but explained how the church's income could be increased by present members bringing in new members and thus new pledges. Mr. Carroll then brought Vestry back to the essential point, which was that the group had made a "firm agreement" on May 16 and that "it remained for the Vestry to devise . . . ways-and-means to fulfill it." He recommended that Senior Warden Robinson and Mr. Fry draft a letter to church members calling for a discussion of the financial future at a meeting after a Parish dinner on June 11, 1952.

And the story goes on, slowly, in the May *Vineyard* and becomes increasingly murky.