

BEGINNING DAYS OF  
SAINT JOHN'S BY THE SEA

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The following material is taken almost word for word from the manuscript "History of the Anglican Communion in Hawaii" by the late C. Fletcher Howe, former Historiographer of the Diocese of Hawaii.

The story of St. John's by the Sea starts with John Townsend. In the 1920's he had expressed a concern for the welfare of his community by leading his Kahaluu neighbors to set aside an area for recreation and to provide a simple hall for meetings. He sensed the need for religious instruction and worship not only for himself but also for the families of the area. So he called the people together to discover their wishes in the matter, and it was decided "by unanimous and solemn vote" to request guidance from the Episcopal Church.

John had come to know through construction work Harold Podmore, a lay member of St. Andrew's Cathedral Parish. He told Harold about the desire of the people for religious leadership, whereupon Harold conferred with the Bishop of Honolulu, the Rt. Rev. S. Harrington Littell. Naturally the Bishop was overjoyed at the prospect of forming a new mission.

On 27 December 1930 the Bishop, together with Mr. Podmore and eleven other Church people, held an informal afternoon meeting with the Kahaluu people. In the course of that gathering, the Bishop gave his assurance that, whenever they were ready, he would send workers first to open a Sunday School and later to maintain a schedule of services.

Bishop Littell received on 2 January 1931 a letter asking that a Sunday School be started on the following Sunday, the 5th. Further information shows that since the first meeting with the Kahaluu people had occurred on the Feast of St. John, Apostle and Evangelist, and since the man who had done so much for those village people was likewise John, the Bishop granted their request that their mission be given the name of ST. JOHN'S BY THE SEA.

Edgar Henshaw, head of the Temperance League of Hawaii, was at that time a postulant studying privately for Holy Orders. The Bishop licensed him as a Lay Reader and committed to him and his ever helpful wife, Edna, the task of gathering the Kahaluu people together in a mission. It was not long before they had them--men, women, and children--so well organized that they were officially received as a mission of the District of Honolulu. Moreover, the old community hall that contained hardly more than a kitchen table and a few backless benches for that first meeting with the Bishop was gradually given a quite churchly appearance for the Sunday gatherings through contributions of furnishings from a number of the Honolulu churches.

Mr. Henshaw was ordained deacon in April, 1932, and priest in February, 1933. This enabled him to expand his usefulness as St. John's Vicar.

Father Henshaw was elected rector of a parish in Arizona, and departed in December, 1935. This was a heavy blow to the Kahaluu congregation, at the time of a nation-wide depression when money [and] priestly help were scarce. Diocesan Treasurer T. J. Hollander and Mrs. Hollander, ably assisted by a native Lay Reader, Charles Hookano, took charge of St. John's by the Sea in the same spirit of affection and devotion which the members had enjoyed under the Henshaws. Mr. Hookano often led the people's worship in their native tongue when it was not convenient for the Hollanders to make the long trip over the Pali.

One of the stalwarts in the early days of St. John's was Charles Hookano. The record shows that he had never missed a service since the mission was founded. During World War II, when the fisher folk were denied their usual occupation, Charles had secured work on a road construction crew. In the course of the first week, he had been told to show up on Sunday. His orders were "This is war; your country first." The dictates of his heart were, however: "This is His Church; Christ first." In some way, an order was obtained from the Military Governor of the Islands which released him from Sunday work. Charles' love for the Church was further shown in the many years of devoted service he gave in his non-fishing hours to caring for the grounds, planting flowers, making repairs here and there, and even caring for the altar brasses, up to the time of his death in 1955.

Tidings reached the Kahaluu people during March, 1937, that Captain Arthur Roberts of the Church Army was on his way from England, and was to be assigned to their mission. His first service for them was on the evening of Good Friday. It was not long afterwards that he had greatly endeared himself not only within the hearts of the people in his charge, but also to many in the larger community. Since St. John's was the only work of our Church on Windward Oahu, Captain Roberts made it his task to reach out far beyond Kahaluu, even though his sole transportation at first was a bicycle. In time that

was replaced by a car so that he could cover much of the area along the coast of that part of Oahu.

In 1939, Bishop Littell felt obliged to transfer Captain Roberts to the Hamakua Coast on Hawaii. Mr. Hollander again assumed charge of St. John's, with the help of Charles Hookano and some of the Honolulu clergy who came for sacramental ministrations.

Now for a few items from the life of this mission as it prospered under Captain Roberts. One had its amusing side. A bill of lading reached the Bishop's office addressed to "Lt. John Bythe Lea in care of the Bishop." Inquiry made by the Bishop's office at several military posts had failed to find such an officer. The bill was for some toys which had been sent by a lady in Texas. She had notified Captain Roberts by letter that these were to arrive for his church children. Eventually he asked at the Bishop's office if they knew of the shipment and to his surprise, found the toys there.

A second item concerns Captain Roberts' efforts to reach the elderly members. He took a course in the Hawaiian Language at the University of Hawaii so that with the assistance of some members of the congregation he could hold a mid-week Bible Class for the older folk who spoke Hawaiian. Still another item covers a project for securing much longed-for premises for the mission. The old community hall had deteriorated badly. Once when Bishop Littell was there on a Sunday in 1939, it was reported, "The old iron roof leaked in places and during the service the Bishop and the congregation dodged drops of rain falling inside." The property on which the structure stood was on the market; and although the Captain had been transferred to the Hamakua Coast before the actual purchase took place, it was largely through his efforts that a portion of the land sufficient for a chapel and vicarage was bought in June, 1941.

Various means for buying the land and erecting a chapel were used. Captain Roberts wrote: "We are having our Annual Gift Day on the Sunday before Thanksgiving (1939), when the offering and the savings boxes will be brought to the altar for the Building Fund. We now have nearly five hundred dollars in the bank. We have a long way to go before we can start to build." Another rather unique method was used. A chart of the area of the land selected was subdivided to represent one-foot squares, which were to be offered for sale at a rate of fifty cents a unit to everyone throughout the Church in the Islands and elsewhere, through a leaflet. Such a scheme was estimated to provide sufficient income to cover the purchase of the site, putting it in order, and for the erection of a simple chapel. It must be added that a later development led to an exchange in the site for the present premises which, although in the same neighborhood, are far better located on the main highway.

All this more material side of the story of St. John's by the Sea has carried its story rather far afield. Captain Roberts' departure again transferred the care of

the Kahaluu people to Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Hollander, assisted at times by clergy from the city. This state of affairs continued during the years of WWII, when numbers of soldiers from a nearby Post, nurses from the Kaneohe Hospital, and other visitors joined the local congregation at the Sunday services. An Army Chaplain was able to be there twice a month to preach and celebrate the Holy Communion.

There were only two missions beyond the limits of the city of Honolulu when Bishop Kennedy entered into his administration of the Church in Hawaii in 1944. The destiny of one, St. Stephen's at Waialua, was quite uncertain, while that of St. John's at Kahaluu was considered very promising. Bishop Keeler of Minnesota, temporarily in charge of the Missionary District of Honolulu in 1943, wrote: "Mr. Hollander's effort is a revelation of how effective and how far reaching a leader's ministry can really be. It is my belief that one of the very first movements for material equipment and expansion that this District must make is a church on our property at Kahaluu, and I hope to accomplish something in that direction."

Mr. Hollander had already created considerable interest among the members in a Building Fund. He reported their wholehearted giving from limited means. The returns from several luaus were added; and "The number of fishes which squirmed into the Fun, who can tell, for this is a fishing village. The Fund grew to \$2,399.87."

The Hawaiian Church Chronicle for March, 1944 records that Bishop Kennedy's very first service in Hawaii came on March 5th, when the lay reader, T. J. Hollander, with his gentle insistence, took the Bishop to that charming village on the other side of the island, sixteen miles away, for his first baptism on condition that he would be back in time for the eleven o'clock service at the Cathedral. It was apparent to the Bishop that a vicarage for the promised priest was the primary need. It was decided to use the building Fund to augment a sum of money given for erecting one on a plot of land given for such a purpose. Bishop Kennedy blessed the new vicarage on 4 June 1944, shortly after the Rev. and Mrs. W. Arthur Roberts had moved in.

The old corrugated-iron community hall that had served as a chapel since 1931 had outgrown its usefulness. The consuming interest of both vicar and people was an edifice "with a roof that is not of leaky tin, that won't leave puddles of water on the floor to be stepped over as they go up to the altar." In addition to their renewed effort in behalf of the Building Fund, the Mission cheerfully responded to Diocesan assessment and similar calls. The Church Chronicle mused: "They wanted a baseball diamond and a recreation park--and they got them--then they wanted a recreation hall--and got it literally by the sweat of their brows; the next was a vicarage, and they have it. Now they will build their church." Such was the spirit of the people!

Six month after the vicarage had been finished, the Building Fund had grown back to \$3,619.18. Father Roberts (now a priest, no longer designated as a Church Army Evangelist) reported that the Diocese of Colorado, the scene of Bishop Kennedy's earlier years in the ministry, had a share through Mite Box offerings amounting to \$1,500.

A decision was reached before any actual construction work began that the old community hall site had many disadvantages. Hence a plot of ground on the main highway was obtained. A leading spirit in that move was the late Dr. Mildred Staley, daughter of the first Bishop of Honolulu, who was deeply interested in St. John's, giving in addition to the funds whereby the vicarage had become a reality, much of her private income toward the new chapel.

Thanksgiving Day, 1945, was a Red Letter Day for that congregation. Father Roberts led his people from a Holy Eucharist in the community hall up to the new premises on Kamehameha Highway for a further service of Blessing of [the site] for their new church. Post-war conditions made it difficult to get materials and labor; but the Chronicle for September, 1946, carried the glad news that actual construction had started. The March, 1947, issue reported on the conducting of the Dedication service on Sunday, 9 March 1947 by Bishop Kennedy although the structure was still incomplete. This was to make it possible for the vicar to be present before sailing for England on furlough.

There were sad hearts among those who were present for that Dedication, for the Heavenly Father had called to Himself two of the faithful among them. "Dora, the wife of the Reverend William Arthur Roberts, passed into eternal rest on 8 June 1946." Dr. Mildred Staley had also passed away about a month before the Dedicatory Day. It was noted in the Chronicle that "Mrs. Staley's life stands as a monument as a missionary, physician, author, builder, educator, artist, welfare worker, devout communicant and generous benefactor of the Church."

It was altogether fitting that a memorial should be prepared for Dr. Staley. A fund was initiated to provide an organ and a set of chimes for the new church. An Estey organ was used for the first time on Sunday, 21 September 1947. The fund in Mildred Staley's memory had reached \$1,200, whereupon the family of the Thayer Music Company of Honolulu donated the needed balance to make the purchase possible.

It may be recalled that John Townsend has been largely instrumental in the founding of St. John's by the Sea, and had served for many years as Senior Warden. That his memory might be kept alive in the hearts of those fisher folks of Kahaluu, a beautiful stained glass window depicting Christ's Calling the Fisherman by the Sea to be his disciples, was given by his family and placed above the main entrance.

Arthur Roberts decided for family reasons to remain in England. Bishop Kennedy committed the charge of St. John's to the Rev. Roland C. Ormsbee, who had been serving temporarily at St. Mary's Mission in Honolulu. Before leaving the Roberts' era of St. John's, it is fitting to tell briefly of Arthur's contribution to the Church in Hawaii. Recalling that he had entered its life as a Church Army Evangelist, it soon became evident that in taking up his life as a priest, he never gave up many of the ways for working he had acquired from his Church Army training. This was especially noted in his going up and down the Windward Coast seeking opportunities for getting acquainted with the people and for interesting them in the Church. For many months he held services at the Benjamin Parker School in Kaneohe on Sundays at eleven o'clock after his ten o'clock service at St. John's. In this way he had planted seed from which sprang St. Christopher's in Kailua, St. Matthew's in Waimanalo, and Calvary Church in Kaneohe. One tiny but important phase of his work was the operation of a "Sunday School by Mail" for at least a dozen children whose families lived too far from the church to attend regularly.

Father Ormsbee continued the work at the Kahaluu Mission as devotedly as his health would allow up to the time of his death in October, 1950. During those few years, or late into 1948, an adjacent plot of land was secured by the Diocesan Board of Directors, and the vicarage was moved from its original site across Kamehameha Highway and relocated on the church premises. St. John's was still unaffected to any extent by the exodus of city people to Windward Oahu. This made it possible to place the Mission temporarily in care of Lay Reader Charles Hookano after Father Ormsbee's passing. Charles had already proved himself quite capable, partly through his being Hawaiian among a people largely of that race and partly due to his faithfulness on past occasions, in leading the Church's worship.

Eventually the care of St. John's in the fall of 1951 was given to the Rev. William R. Grosh in connection with his duties at St. Matthew's, Waimanalo. Since no vicarage was available for the Grosh family at Waimanalo, the recently enlarged and renovated vicarage at St. John's was proving a happy solution for them. Father Grosh had been a Navy pilot stationed at Barber's Point for a part of WWII, and returned to the Islands as a Deacon in 1950. He was advanced to the Priesthood in December, 1950.

While Father Grosh continued his pastorate at St. John's, his other assignment was transferred from St. Matthew's, Waimanalo, to the newly instituted Calvary Mission at Kaneohe, in the summer of 1954. St. John's kept on growing even in a material way, since another plot of ground contiguous to the church premises was added in this period for the construction of a parish hall.

The Chronicle for 1955 records varied happenings at Kahaluu. The Groshes moved to Kaneohe to give full time to that new mission. The Rev. Kenneth T. Cosbey was transferred to St. John's from Eleele, Kauai, by the fall of 1955.

Another item brought a note of sadness, for the death in October of Lay Reader Charles Hookano meant a tremendous loss to the community as well as to the Church. "He was one of the most devout laymen in our Church, spending every spare moment that he had putting around the mission, making repairs, and planting and tending the flowers on the mission grounds. He hadn't missed a church service since the mission was started."

Father Cosbey headed St. John's up to the summer of 1959, when he was transferred to the chaplaincy of Iolani School. He had been successful in clearing away the debt on the church building. The service for its consecration by Bishop Kennedy came on 21 October 1956, and was witnessed by its former faithful shepherd, Mr. T. J. Hollander, who observed his 92nd birthday the following month.

With the departure of the Cosbey family, the Rev. Roger M. Melrose was appointed Vicar of St. John's. As in the case of his two predecessors, he had been a Naval officer in WWII and spend some time in Hawaii. He had married the daughter of the late Rev. Kenneth O. Miller and of the still surviving Mrs. Miller. After the war, he had been active in the Church in a lay role at Hood River, Oregon, while successfully managing a business firm in that locality. He and Mrs. Melrose soon won the hearts of the St. John's children by a summer school, when they were introduced to "Craft Fun." The HCC reported: "From the personal resources of the mothers and with the help of craft books and native materials, paint and play-dough, nimble fingers began to fly. There was something even for three-year-olds, while the older boys had their coconuts to carve and paint. The eleven to fourteen year olds learned lauhala weaving from scratch."

Father Melrose was advanced to the Priesthood at St. John's on 5 December 1959. An outstanding event that characterized the all too few years he had at Kahaluu was the erection of the Charles Hookano Memorial Hall in 1960. A gift of \$8,000 from the U. T. O. Fund had been received for the parish hall, while the members pledged \$3,200 to permit additional work on the building so that its use can meet the needs of the whole mission and community. Ground breaking took place on 14 February 1960, and the structure was dedicated on 15 November 1960. It was of the Butler frame type, 32 x 60 feet in size, with an aluminum roof and a concrete floor. Kitchen and toilet facilities were included at the time, but the siding for the hall was to be added later.

The 30th anniversary of the Mission was observed on 7 January 1961, when the highlight of the more social part of the event was the story of early days as told by Keona Joe Kona. He had been one of the Hawaiian swimmers who had dismantled the old Libby warehouse and floated it around the shore to the first location of St. John's.

As noted previously, St. John's was not at first affected to any extent by a population exodus from Honolulu to Windward Oahu. It had aided its newer and more rapidly growing sister missions at Kailua, Waimanalo, and Kaneohe by lending its Vicars. And now the time came when it was again in a position to aid in the founding of still another mission along the Windward Coast. The HCC for December, 1959 reported that Roger Melrose was holding services in the homes of our Church people at Laie. This activity culminated in the founding of Holy Cross Mission at Malaekahana Bay in the Kahuku area.

Father Melrose was elected Rector of the Church of the Good Shepherd at Wailuku, Maui, during the summer of 1962. In October, he was succeeded at St. John's by the Rev. Covy E. Blackmon, who also had been a Navy pilot in WWII and had been in charge of St. Barnabas' Mission, Ewa Beach, at the time of his transfer.

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So much for the BEGINNING DAYS OF ST. JOHN'S BY THE SEA.

I am sure there must be someone in the congregation who will be willing to bring this record up-to-date and to take care that notes are kept herein on future developments, so that those who come after may know and be proud of the remarkable history of St. John's.

K. D. P.