

Remembering "God's Answer to Our Prayer"

The Reverend William Francis Burke and St. Andrew's Day School

By

Linda Harrell Coffman



St. Andrew's Day School c. 1952

At five years old, my going to school in one of the Hilton duplexes held no particular uniqueness for me. It was school. However, the intrigue of it decades later brings a nostalgia so pronounced that sometimes I have to shake some of it off to distance myself from 1952. Moments when I can allow my memory to freely go there are like blueberry muffins fresh from the oven--sweet and warm, lingering.

Extra-wide steps that greeted the students made an impression as did the short hallway, with hooks for coats and hats, that led into a larger room, probably the living and dining room. Little did I realize that classrooms upstairs, where Mrs. Lilly and Mrs. Gray taught, were once bedrooms! The playground had the regular accoutrements, but the little cinder block house with a door and window was noteworthy as each year every student was photographed looking out that window. Framed by a tin can's top, its edge adorned by tiny spikes (ouch!), this keepsake was presented to parents.

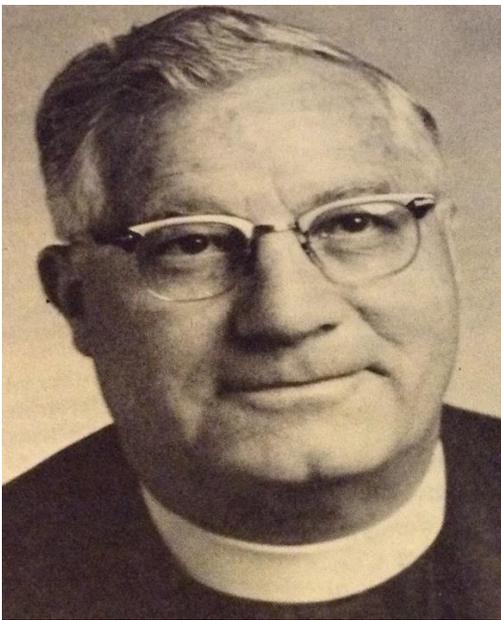


**St. Andrew's Day School graduation 1952
(Linda Harrell, bottom right)**



Linda Harrell's Tin Can Frame Photo

Sometime later, after improvements were begun, a stage, of which one can still see the outline in the Parish Hall's floor, served to present many a pageant. You may see some familiar faces in this graduation picture, where some have retired, or sadly, are no longer with us.



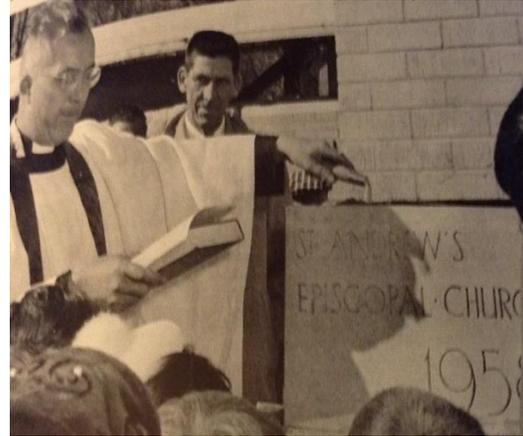
***"O God, make the door of this church wide enough to receive all who need human love, fellowship and thy Fatherly care; make it narrow enough to shut out envy, pride and hate. Make its threshold smooth enough to be inviting to children or to straying feet; but rugged enough to turn back the tempter's power. O God, make the door of this house the gateway to Thy Kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord."* William Francis Burke (1911-1974)**

In June, 1954, St. Andrew's received a blessing in the arrival of William Francis Burke. The church *Bulletin* in May announced his appointment as "God's answer to our prayer." Coming from Saint Thomas Episcopal Church in Orange, Virginia, Mr. Burke had previously been an Army Chaplain in World War II, his Division landing on Normandy's beaches on D-Day.

When the search committee went to interview Mr. Burke, Vestry member Tom Lawford said they also took a look at the rectory and thought that Mrs. Burke most certainly would never agree to leave "the beautiful brick mansion" for our smaller Brandon Heights rectory. A further fly in the ointment was that on exactly the same day, The U.S. Military Academy invited Mr. Burke to accept their call to come to West Point. Evidently, only God knew what swayed Mr. Burke to make his choice - Saint Andrew's over the draw of West Point. The committee knew it wasn't the house!



William Francis Burke, U.S. Army Chaplain in World War II



The Reverend Francis Burke Dedicating the Church Cornerstone in 1958

To many in our congregation, he was Mr. Burke or Father Burke; to a few he was Francis; but to me and perhaps other children, he was like a grandfather. He held this church with a firm grip, yet with laughter, originality, some brusqueness, a little "Army language" and love. Mr. Burke was a man's man and a charmer to the ladies.

His birthday was February 14. With clear memory, I recall the parties each year, complete with balloons, cake and joviality. Mr. Burke had a chuckle that echoed through the halls and church. Will we ever forget the day when he stepped into the pulpit, removed his watch, placed it where he could keep an eye on it, and announced "This is going to be a short one--baseball game starts in 20 minutes." This was the spirit of Mr. Burke--spontaneity. Now, this characteristic presented itself more than once, but never so profoundly as the day his sermon must have included description of a rather irascible Biblical character. Others can probably attest to hearing "S.O.B." somewhere in that sermon. To myself, about 10 or 11, I thought hmmm, that's what Daddy says out the window sometimes when we're in the car!

My mother often told the story of two little girls, students at the school, who passed by Mr. Burke's office. One said to the other, "Shhh, Jesus is in there drinking his coffee." Only once do I recall seeing Mr. Burke without his clerical collar. Seeing him in a sports shirt was almost startling.

What a celebratory day it was when in 1958 the cornerstone was prayerfully dedicated. I wanted to remember the words, Mr. Burke, the feelings, the whole of it. To this day, I love passing by it.

Confirmation with The Laying on of Hands by Bishop Rose was a spiritual passage of life not to be taken lightly. Classes, led by Mr. Burke, introduced us to The Book of Common Prayer: its rubrics, The Catechism, the Creed, and the Sacraments. He spoke to us regarding taking the Lord's name in vain, how we do so unconsciously; as saying golly, gosh, gosh darn, is the same as saying God. Likewise, Sunday school was well attended. Our teacher, Mrs. Regelman, made sure we learned the Calendar of the Church Year, its various colors and meanings. By memory we learned Bible verses, and the Books of the Bible (in order). I still have my workbook.

Mr. Burke, as Clergy routinely do, was often at the hospital, making rounds. It was reassuring to see him enter--one seemed to feel better immediately. One such visit to my mother after her first mastectomy

proved this point. Taking Mama's hand, he looked in her eyes with that smile and said, "Now, don't you worry Honey; you can cook with just one as well as with two." Only Mr. Burke...

Similarly, in 1970, as Mr. Burke prepared to marry Kohl and me, he had asked Kohl to come to his office for a get-acquainted-talk. In another meeting, Mr. Burke asked Kohl to just take a seat in the Parish Hall, where there were two pews. As his bachelor party had been the night before, the husband-to-be fell asleep. Mr. Burke found him lying in the pew! His wake-up words were "Young man, do you want to get married or not!!"

When one ponders the past, a sole remembrance usually begets another, and so on. What joy to reminisce about Saint Andrew's, and her many parishioners, children, teachers, ministers, staff members, musicians and souls who have made our church what it is. However, life is not stagnant, but ever-rolling, with only God knowing the day and time for everything. His children, not privy to these things, must be ready constantly. Having Mr. Burke pass away at Christmas added a veil of disbelief to the grief already present. Thankfully, for evermore The Reverend William Francis Burke will be in these walls, our sacred altar, and our hearts forever. How could he not be?

ST. ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

HONOR ROLL

This month's list highlights parishioners not mentioned in previous issues who worshipped at St. Andrew's during the period of The Reverend Mr. Burke's tenure (1954-1974).

**The Reverend Mr. Lloyd Clarke
(Assistant Priest 1955-1956)**

**The Reverend Mr. William
Moore (Assistant Priest 1956-
1959)**

**The Reverend Mr. James King
(Assistant Priest 1959-1962)**

**The Reverend Mr. Raymond
Lawrence (Assistant Priest
1962-1964)**

**The Reverend Mr. Howard M.
Saunders (Assistant Priest
1964-1972, 1999-2005)**

**The Reverend Mr. Joseph
Buchanan, Jr. (Assistant Priest
1972-1982)**

Mrs. Betty Burke

Mr. David Buchanan

Mr. Andy Bachman

Mrs. Edna Bachman

Mr. Eddie Bachman

Mr. George Passage

Mrs. Mary Passage

Mr. Richard Newman

Mrs. Elizabeth Newman

Miss Betsy Newman

Mr. Dick Newman

Mr. George Wise

Mrs. Annie Wise

Mr. George Wise, Jr.

Miss Nan Wise

Miss Gay Wise

Mr. Gus Wise

Mr. O. Reid Hudson, Jr.

Mrs. Texalee Hudson

Mr. Reid Hudson III

Miss Gretchen Hudson

Mr. C.B. Harrell, Jr.

Mrs. Jean Harrell

Mrs. Linda Harrell Coffman

Mr. Kohl Coffman

Mrs. Allison Harrell Parker

Mr. Carter Harrell

Mrs. Lisa Harrell

Miss Elizabeth Harrell

Mr. Spencer Harrell