**St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church – Historical Perspective**

St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church had its beginning in 1939 when a small group of Episcopal Church members of the Prairie View A. & M. College community met to discuss the formation of a permanent Episcopal chaplaincy and congregation in Prairie View, Texas. Miss Maude Ernestine Suarez, Dean of Women at the college was a leading member of this group.

Other early leaders in the establishment and development of the church included Dr. E. B. Evans, who served as president of Prairie View A. & M. College from 1946-1966, Mr. and Mrs. R. B. Atwood, Bishop Denby of Cleveland, Ohio; and Father John B. Boyce, Mrs. Ann C. Preston, Colonel West A. Hamilton, the Menke family of Hempstead, Mrs. Eula Dooley, Mrs. Jimmie Ruth Phillips, Dr. and Mrs. C. H. Nichols, Mrs. Eloise Williams, Dr. J. L. Brown, Mrs. Naomi Thomas Baker, Mr. John Ledbetter, Dr. & Mrs. R. Von Charleton, Dr. & Mrs. E. G. High, Dr. & Mrs. D. S. Yarbrough, Mr. & Mrs. Julius Jones, Ms. Kathryn Jordan, Ms. Nerissa Stickney, Mrs. Ollie Mae Scott, Mr. & Mrs. William E. Reid, Sr. and Mr. H. E. Mazyck, Jr.

In 1950, this group officially formed itself into the St. Francis of Assisi Mission Congregation in the Diocese of Texas. The first Vicar for the congregation was the Reverend James Murray, a graduate of Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, and Bishop Baines Seminary in Virginia. Father Murray was also Vicar of St. James’ Episcopal Church in Austin, Texas, a ministry he had begun in the late 1940's.

Since its founding the following Clergy served as Vicars:

James H. Murray 1941-51

Arthur Callaway 1952-55

Joseph B. White 1955-56

Charles F. Hood 1957-59

Hugh Donald Keeling 1960-63

James T. Moore 1963-72

James Ramsey 1972-73

Robert Moore 1973-78

James Sproates 1978-83

Andrew Mepham 1983-90

Earlie Clemons 1990–92

St. Francis of Assisi became a Parish in February 1992 under The Rev. Earlie Clemons who served until 1998.

The following served as rectors following Rev. Clemons.

Everett Fredholm 2000-05

Matthias Onyendi 2006-07

Cynthia Engle 2011-19

The Reverend Rhonda Rogers, ordained as a priest on January 18, 2020, is the current rector of St. Francis of Assisi. She was called as Deacon in Charge on August 1, 2019.

The St. Francis’s congregation met in the Guest House Building on the campus of Prairie View from its inception. In June 15, 1957, the former church building of St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal congregation, Hempstead, was moved to Prairie View and became the church building for the St. Francis congregation. Erected in 1870, consecrated by the Rt. Reverend Alexander Gregg, the first Bishop of Texas, it is one of the oldest frame Episcopal churches in the Diocese of Texas. At a special service in the evening of May 16, 1963, the Waller County Historical Society with the assistance of the Army ROTC of the College erected a Texas Historical Society plaque in the vestibule of the historic church. Since 1994, the building now serves as the home for Hope AME Church in Prairie View, Texas and is located on Sandra Bland Boulevard.

The first service in the church included the baptism of Dannis ‘Frontious’ Michael Ledbetter. On the Feast of St. James the Apostle, July 25, 1957, the Rt. Reverend Frederick Percy of Goddard, Suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, confirmed nine candidates for the first time. The first marriage Rite was between Mr. George Murrel Sims and Miss Nell Rose Antoine on May 12, 1961.

On October 4, 1964, the congregation began an annual celebration of the patron Saint, St. Francis of Assisi, with a Solemn High Eucharist followed by a procession with the Saint’s stature through the streets of Prairie View and concluded with a parish supper. The congregation marked the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., with Requiem services. On October 10, 1969, the Rt. Reverend Josiah Mtekateka, Bishop of Lake Malawi, Africa, celebrated a Solemn Even Song Service. Earlier in the day the bishop addressed a campus-wide luncheon in the Memorial Student Union.

A particularly happy occasion for the congregation was on June 15, 1969 when the first Vicar, Father James Murray returned to St. Francis to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination as a priest.

Parish organizations included the Women of St. Francis, the Senior Choir, the Altar Guild, and the Men of St. Francis. In the late 1950's, the Episcopal college students organized the Canterbury Club, a part of the National Episcopal Campus Ministry. Under the leadership of Dr. Curtis A. Wood as superintendent, the church school was established in 1960. Other successful ministries included the Junior Choir, the ASTEP and the W.O.R.D. after school program, Vacation Bible School and Bell Troop for youth in the community.

The Right Reverend John E. Hines, then Bishop of the Diocese of Texas and later, Presiding Bishop of the Church in the United States, and his successor in the Diocese of Texas, the Right Reverend James Milton Richardson, oversaw the construction of the rectory. On June 3, 1967, the Right Reverend Scott Field Bailey, Suffragan Bishop of Texas, formally dedicated the completed rectory. On May 1, 1971, Bishop Bailey broke ground for the ‘new’ St. Francis’s Church and Parish Hall.

On April 9, 1972, the Bishop of Texas, the Right Reverend James Milton Richardson, dedicated the new facilities. The congregation prayed that the dedication would be a new beginning in the life of love and service to our Lord Jesus Christ for St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church in Prairie View, Texas.