

# Captain Walt Swindells speaks from Hillspeak

by Holly Michael

An ecumenical service by the river in San Antonio, Texas drew Captain Walt Swindells into the Episcopal Church in 1959.

The service, though ecumenical, used the 1928 Book of Common Prayer as its basis, Swindells said.

“I fell in love with the book and the service,” Swindells, then a Methodist, said. He soon joined the Episcopal Church and was confirmed by Bishop Charles James Kinsolving III.

When a new prayer book was being introduced in the 1970’s, Swindells said it was primarily Fr. Foland who had pushed



him to attend the Congress of St. Louis. “Fr. Foland was unhappy with what was being done with the prayer book and vehemently opposed to the ordination of women,” Swindells said. “He wanted me to go and see what the Congress of St. Louis was all about.”

“My own convictions were not so strong,” Swindells said, “but I felt very strongly about the revisions in the Prayer Book and was saddened by the loss of the real language in it.”

Swindells found himself on the committee to draft the affirmation along with Fr. George Clendenin, a priest from Califor-

nia, Fr. Simcox, Perry Laukhuff, Fr. James Parker and others. Before the Congress, the group met in Albany, Georgia at Fr. James Parker’s church to draft the affirmation.

“When we got to St. Louis everyone had a different idea of what should be in it,” Swindells said. “We met until two in the morning and then I gave up, telling them I couldn’t think of anything else. By daylight, they had what essentially became the affirmation.”

Swindells said that most were still pretty optimistic about the Episcopal Church turning around.

“I thought I would remain in the church and it would change,” Swindells said. He said that the Congress was largely a lay movement and when it became evident they couldn’t turn the Episcopal Church around they decided to remain a church grounded on Biblical framework using the 1928 Book of Common Prayer as the guide. Swindells resigned as Bishop’s Warden upon his return from the congress.

Swindells said that most of the work of the movement after the congress was from the Fellowship of Concerned Christian (FCC). He served on board as secretary and treasurer at different times and also as Editor of the organization’s newsletter. After the Congress of St. Louis, the FCC had organized the meeting in Denver, where they were to select the new Bishops.

“Albert Chambers, who was an Episcopal Bishop was going to do the consecrations with Bishop Boynton but Boynton had a heart condition and could not go,” Swindells said. “Chambers wanted it to be done right and so someone got a hold of Pagtakhan of the Philippine Independent Church who agreed to be a consecrator. Bp. Mark Pae, a Korean Bishop had volunteered to go. Someone, we assumed the Archbishop of Canterbury, told him not to go so he deputized Fr. Doren to act in his stead. When they did the consecrations, Doren was first, then he took part in consecrating Morse, Mote, and Watterson.

Swindells said that immediately after the consecrations each Bishop took off in his own direction.

“The focus on the Congress of St. Louis was to provide a place for people who didn’t or couldn’t follow in the footsteps the Episcopal Church was taking,” Swindells said. “And the plan of the FCC was to cease to exist once it accomplished what it set out to do. He said that he thought that would happen when the bishops were consecrated in Denver.

“At the time of the Denver consecration, I thought that our purpose had been accomplished but was disappointed when the church immediately broke off into little segments,” he said.

“Each bishop had an interest to protect their turf and there really wasn’t enough turf to protect. They lost focus. Problems often arise with the “human element.”

“In the early English church and in the continuing church—the foibles and failures of some parts of that human element that have kept the church from becoming what I hoped it would become, a single strong church,” said Swindells. “Now, it’s important that the continuing church focus on what had already been built and renew what was working, using the three houses of governance and relying on Scripture, tradition and reason.”

*Captain Walt Swindells is currently the Trustees Warden for Hillspeak and resides in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. Hillspeak is the Society for Promoting and Encouraging Arts and Knowledge [of the Church] at Hillspeak, Eureka Springs, Arkansas. Hillspeak publishes the Anglican Digest, an independent voice reflecting the ministry of the faithful throughout the Anglican Communion since 1958. Captain Walt served in the US Marine Corps.*



# New Beginnings



*Bishop James and Madelyn McNeley speaking from Fort Scott, Kansas. Interview by Bishop Leo and Holly Michael*

When his priest at St. Andrew's in Fort Scott—fed up with the direction of the Episcopal Church—left, it was up to Bishop James McNeley, then Senior Warden, to figure out a way to keep the church open. It wasn't long before news of a gathering in St. Louis came to the church's attention and Bishop McNeley was elected to go to St. Louis.

"Madelyn and I were asked to attend by the members of the congregation and to bring home information," he said. "So we attended the congress, sat through all the speeches, were present at nearly every workshop and when we returned home we contacted each member of the congregation and gave them the information that we'd picked up. We offered no sales pitch but only acted as a mailman."

The congregation of St. Andrew's studied the information and took their time before making any decision regarding the direction of their church.

"We were not theologians," Bishop McNeley said. "We were merely members of St. Andrew's who were among the younger people who could do things around the church."

The McNeleys both had served on most all offices of the vestry, painted, cleaned and took on many temporal tasks at the church. Madelyn McNeley taught the Sunday school and the couple ran a bus, picking up kids and bringing them to the church.

"After awhile the people became restless and wanted to do something," Bishop McNeley said.

According to Bishop McNeley, most of the people of St. Andrew's decided to follow the movement of the continuing church that formed after the Affirmation of St. Louis.

"During this time, Father Foland and Captain Walt Swindells at Hillspeak were very supportive and helpful. After we came home from St. Louis we were asked to make suggestions for canons and send them to Hillspeak and they would send them to some committee," Bishop McNeley said. "So many things were being

written about how churches could proceed in this new direction and we did as advised."

"We are told to leave everything behind and not even take a paper clip," Madelyn McNeley said. "And that's what we did. At that time people were more than ready to start over. Bishop Turner, the Episcopal Bishop of Southeast Kansas, said we needed to stay and fight from within, but that time was over."

Bishop McNeley, recalling those days, says he never planned on becoming ordained.

"There couldn't have been anything farther from my mind that I would be ordained to anything," he said. "Finally, I agreed to become a deacon because others in the church thought I should become a deacon."

Soon St. Francis, with 45 people on the roll, had begun. This group that left St. Andrews started in homes, then the mortuary, then the Lutheran church, and then finally purchased the Christian Science church and remodeled it. Bishop McNeley was ordained a priest one year after serving as deacon. He served at St. Francis until 1985, when, as Archdeacon, was asked to move to Kansas City and help with St. James. He was consecrated Bishop in 1993.

Looking ahead, Bishop McNeley talks about the future of the Holy Catholic Church Anglican Rite.

"I never look forward to splits," he said, "but what do the people want us to do, lie to them? No. We are doing exactly what we are supposed to be doing, what we promised to people for years. We are not splitting but carrying on with what we promised the people at St. Louis," he said.

Bishop McNeley stresses the importance of the church being about the people and for the people. "People need to tell us if this is not what they want," he said. "If people want to be eliminated from the operations of the church, then we'll do that, but that's not what people are telling us."

Bishop McNeley says that the Diocese of Holy Trinity was, right from the start, part of the continuing church movement. "St. Francis was one of the first churches formed after the Congress of St. Louis," he said.

"And the Movement has been fine," he says. "What we are doing is the right thing, but we've been doing it with imperfect people. We began with four bishops and they fought and argued like three-year-olds and there were problems. People were apprehensive and they needed stability, someone with leadership. The problems in the continuing church have stemmed from leadership and not from the movement itself."

"All people need to do is read the introductory address from Perry Laukhoff in St. Louis and look at the Affirmation of St. Louis and at least look at what we said we would do at St. Louis," he said. "What we are doing is exactly what we told them we'd do. If we are straying from that, then the people need to point that out to us."

"All churches have splits," he said, "but the responsibility of the people is to be stalwarts of the church and to follow what is happening in their church."

Bishop McNeley said that the problems heightened in the Episcopal Church because people weren't paying attention to what was going on in their church. "Go to synods," he says. "Take an active interest in your church."

"People are supposed to have a vote in the governance of the church," Bishop McNeley said. "And that's been a part of the English church too—part of the historic Anglican Church." \*\*\*

