



St. Mary's Episcopal Church

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April 18, 2016

The 129th Gathering of The Episcopal Church Women
Of the Diocese of Louisiana
St. James Episcopal Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70760

Dear ECW:

As you gather on the week-end of April 22-23 for your annual meeting, the people of St. Mary's Church in Morganza will also be gathering for a special occasion that celebrates the legacy of the work of the women in our Church from prior generations. We want to share something of that legacy with you.

The seeds of faith which brought forth St. Mary's Church were planted in Pointe Coupee Parish by women. We know a little bit about some of them. In the early 1900's, Mrs. James Walter Campbell (Ellen Watson Turner) and her sister, Miss Evie Turner, began a Sunday School in Morganza. By 1911, this group of people had become identified as an 'unorganized mission' in Diocesan records. By 1914, the Woman's Auxiliary of the Diocese of Louisiana had determined to build a chapel in Morganza for this mission congregation. With subscription pledges of \$1 from women across the State of Louisiana, and from other donations, the women of the church quickly acquired sufficient funds to build the church. Mrs. Lydia Wickliffe Holmes was honored by Bishop Sessums for her coordination of this extraordinary campaign. Construction started in 1915 and St. Mary's Church was consecrated on May 16, 1916. The name of "St. Mary's" was chosen in honor of the women who had worked so hard to establish it.

Another woman was prominent in the minds and memories of the people in Pointe Coupee Parish at the time of this dedication. The name of Mrs. Sara Archer appears in historical records beginning prior to the Civil War. She is said to have driven her wagon to the mission at Williamsport (now called St. Stephen's) every Sunday, picking up people along the way. She was never a member of St. Mary's Church, but her efforts on behalf of the missions of Pointe Coupee Parish must have been significant. At the time of the consecration of St. Mary's, a marble plaque in her memory was installed by the Woman's Auxiliary. The plaque remains there today.

The women did more than deliver a building to the St. Mary congregation free and clear of any debt. They also provided a four-piece communion set. Mrs. Holmes, having retrieved melted silver from the ashes of a family home destroyed by fire, started a collection of silver and gold from other women; these metals were used in the crafting of the communion pieces. We still use this communion set at St. Mary's today and it remains very beautiful!

And there were other women and certainly many men as well – some whose names history has recorded and others whose names may have now been forgotten – whose faith and love formed the church of St. Mary's. As I reflect upon these people – the challenges which they faced, the determination and hope with which they labored, the gifts they shared which continue to be shared today – I am humbled and grateful for them. It seems to me that they knew a lot about following the way of Jesus with a Mary heart. They traveled long distances on barely passable roads and waterways to gather together. They studied Holy Scripture and prayed the prayers of common worship and celebrated the sacraments whenever they could obtain the services of a priest. They endured many hardships – isolation, yellow fever epidemics, wars, floods, fires, crop failures and economic disasters. They washed and

buried the bodies of their children and their spouses and their friends. And yet they stood at those graves and sang Alleluia, and they picked up the pieces of their broken hearts and shared their love with others. What an inspiration these saints are to me! I hope that by recalling them on this day, they will be so to you as well.

On Saturday evening, April 23, 2016, we will be gathering at St. Mary's Church in Morganza at 4:00 p.m. to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the consecration of our church building. We will be remembering the work of the women who gave us a church building. But we will be celebrating much more than a building. We will be proclaiming in faith that regardless of whether history records our names, God does. And we will be proclaiming that the work that we do as the Church, the Body of Christ in this world, is endowed with everlasting life – a life that will influence those whom we will never know who come after us. May we be faithful to this call, this life in the days ahead.

Thank you for the continued gifts of the Episcopal Church Women to the Church – for your presence and your work and your prayers. May God bless your gathering and each of you.

In the name of Christ,

The Reverend Peggy King Scott
Priest-in-Charge
St. Mary's Church, Morganza

cc: The Rt. Rev. Morris K. Thompson, Jr., D.D.
St. Mary's Church