

# Episcopal Life THIS WEEK

Looking Forward, Looking Back

## Virginia and Its Dioceses: Uniting Indigenous and Immigrant People

*Jamestown's 400<sup>th</sup> year is milestone for Episcopal Church, colonial parishes*

*Last in a four-part series*



*St. John's, Hampton, at Christmastide*

Established in 1610, St. John's Episcopal Church in Hampton, Virginia, is the oldest Anglican parish in continuous existence in the Americas. It was formed three years after the Jamestown Colony's settlement — the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which will be marked in 2007 and commemorate the English colonists' First Landing on April 26, 1607, along what is now Virginia Beach.

The site of Jamestown's original parish church is now marked by a memorial chapel visited by thousands who tour the surrounding national park. But it is St. John's Church that has continued in parish ministry, withstanding crises including the Civil War: in August 1861, "to keep the town out of Federal hands" residents "set fire to their homes, businesses and the church sanctuary," a parish historian writes. "The great bell was destroyed, and only the blackened walls remain when Union soldiers camped in the churchyard."

Settlers and soldiers migrated to "the fertile shores of Hampton Roads to escape the famine and disease which had decimated the residents of Jamestown. Here, with the friendly Kecoughtan Indians, they found a more congenial environment.... In 1619, 'Kecoughtan' was named 'Elizabeth City' in honor of the daughter of King James I, but the beautiful Indian name continued in popular use for another century. The settlement was then renamed 'Southampton' to honor the Earl who was a major stockholder of the Virginia Company. In time the name was shortened to 'Hampton.' The church also evolved through the centuries," and occupied four parish sites, including present cruciform building, completed in 1728.

Like Williamsburg's Bruton Parish, which dates from 1633, St. John's is part of the Norfolk-based Diocese of Southern Virginia, where 122 congregations are led by interim Bishop John Buchanan. America's colonial period both began and ended within this diocese, starting in 1607 in Jamestown and concluding after the Revolutionary War's final major battle, fought at Yorktown in 1781. Divided from the parent Diocese of Virginia in 1892, Southern Virginia will, on June 24, 2007, welcome Episcopalians to Jamestown for a large liturgical gathering with the dioceses of Southwestern Virginia, Virginia, and West Virginia. At Washington National Cathedral, which will mark its own centennial in 2007, a celebration of indigenous ministries is planned for April, and Virginia Day will be observed October 21.

Central to these liturgies will be expressions of Native American history and spirituality. Bishop Carol Gallagher (Cherokee), who began her episcopal ministry in Southern Virginia, is among leaders working to assure the perspectives of First Nation Episcopalians and their contemporary concerns are accentuated by the upcoming historical observances.

Likewise, in the Diocese of Southwestern Virginia, Bishop Neff Powell will in 2007 ordain to the priesthood Phyllis Branham Hicks (Monacan) in services set for St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Bear Mountain Area, Amherst, Virginia. Based in Roanoke, the 58-congregation diocese was established in 1919, having been divided from the Diocese of Southern Virginia.

The neighboring Diocese of West Virginia, formed in 1878 and based in Charleston, shares in the region's history with 77 congregations overseen by Bishop W. Michie Klusmeyer. And the original Diocese of Virginia, formalized in 1785 and based in Richmond with nearly 200 congregations, will make new history in 2007 with the election of a bishop coadjutor to succeed Peter James Lee, who has led the diocese since 1985. The Virginia diocese's history is traced by scholars Joan Gundersen and Edward Bond in a new book set for publication in 2007.

While the Spanish first landed in Florida in 1513 and later formed Roman Catholic parishes, several of the New World's earliest English-speaking congregations continue today within the Episcopal Church — in the first nine dioceses represented at the first General Convention in May 1785 (commemorated as nine star crosses on the Episcopal Church shield).

**Connecticut:** Clergy first met in 1783 and later formed the Episcopal Church's oldest organized diocese; Christ Church, Stratford, dates from 1702.

**Maryland:** First convention, 1784; St. Paul's, Baltimore, dates from 1692.

**Massachusetts:** First convention, 1785; St. Paul's, Newburyport, was founded in 1711, and Anglicans worshipped in Amesbury as early as 1666

**New Jersey:** First convention, 1785; Old St. Mary's, Burlington, dates from 1703.

**New York:** First convention, 1785; Trinity, Wall Street, dates from 1697, and its affiliated St. Paul's Chapel, spared in the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center, was completed in 1764.

**Pennsylvania:** First convention, 1785; Christ Church, Philadelphia, dates from 1695, and it's the site of the Episcopal Church's first General Convention in 1785.

**South Carolina:** First convention, 1785; St. Michael's, Charleston, completed in 1761, continues original ministry of St. Philip's dating from 1680s.

**Virginia:** Diocesan origins, 1607 with the Jamestown Colony; first convention, 1785; St. John's, Hampton, dates from 1610 in Diocese of Southern Virginia.

**Delaware:** Diocese dates from 1786; Immanuel, New Castle, from 1689.

### Sources:

- Archives of the Episcopal Church, <http://www.episcopalarchives.org>;
- The dioceses of Virginia; St. John's Parish, Hampton, Virginia, <http://www.stjohnshampton.org>

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