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## **The Washington Chapter of the American Anglican Council**

### **Fr. Edwards Holds First Service of St. Mary's Mission**

By Robert Stowe England  
July 7, 2002

WALDORF, Maryland -- Fr. Samuel Edwards, former rector of Christ Church, Accokeek, preached and celebrated the Holy Eucharist early this afternoon at the first service for the Anglican Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, a newly-minted mission of the Anglican Province of Christ the King.

The service, which attracted 24 people, was held here at Middleton Hall, a handsome, modern meeting facility owned by the Charles County Sportsmans Club. The mission's next service will be held at the same facility Sunday [June 14] at 1 p.m.

Fr. Edwards welcomed those who attended -- most of whom were from southern Maryland -- into the "adventure" that lies ahead for the new church. He told the gathering that he had received messages from around the world that people would be praying for the launch of the new mission and for its first service.

Fr. Edwards, who renounced his ministry in the Episcopal Church June 27, preached on Jesus' admonition to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, who were highly regarded in their day for their devotion to religious law and practice.

It's not enough to be a quiet, decent person who follows the rules and is kind to others, Fr. Edwards said. We must also repent and open ourselves to God's will. "You cannot separate repentance from the message of the Gospel," he stated.

"God lays a claim not only on our outward actions but also on our selves. We are not called just to be do-gooders, but to be good with God's goodness, to let God's goodness get into us."

Fr. Edwards recalled the language of St. Paul, who told the early Christians they were "dead men" who were alive only through Christ. "We have to let ourselves die to ourselves in order to be ourselves at all," he said.

"We are dead to the world. The life we had was drowned in baptism. Our new life was given to us when we were raised from baptism with the seal of Christ," he said.

In a forum following the service, Fr. Edwards said that the purpose of the mission was to give people in southern Maryland an opportunity to worship in the rich tradition of the Anglican Way.

When asked why he chose the Anglican Province of Christ the King to continue his ministry as a priest, Fr. Edwards replied, "This is the most stable of all the provinces of the continuing churches. It's doctrinally sound and institutionally stable."

Fr. Edwards said he intended to define the ministry of the parish in positive terms and not as something that is in reaction to troubles in the Episcopal Church. "As long as we think of ourselves as Episcopalians-in-exile, we're still Episcopalians," he said. "I'm past that now, and it's a wonderful feeling," he said.

Fr. Edwards noted that there are now young adults in the Province of Christ the King, which has about 80 parishes, who never had any experience in the Episcopal Church, and who are now bringing their children to be baptized, preparing a second generation that has no memory of the Episcopal Church.

Fr. Edwards noted that there is a number of people at the Parish of Christ the King in Georgetown, D.C., who were previously unchurched Americans. There are also two converts from other faiths, a former Moslem from Somalia and a former Shinto from Japan.

Referring to Middleton Hall as a "preliminary interim location" for the mission, Fr. Edwards said that by the fall he hoped to have "an interim location" that would allow the parish to hold Sunday morning services.

The service was held at 1 p.m. because the facility was in use in the morning by Mt. Calvary Church, an independent church headed by Pastor Paul Goodwin. Pastor Goodwin and his congregation of several hundred people prayed for St. Mary's in their morning service, Fr. Edwards reported.

During the forum, a member of an Episcopal Church in St. Mary's county asked Fr. Edwards if the Province of Christ the King had a way of disciplining bishops to prevent people like former Newark Episcopal Church Bishop Jack Spong from holding office.

Fr. Edwards explained that disciplinary action against bishops and priests is swift and fair in the church and that the province had taken a course of slow, careful growth and examination of priest candidates for the province to be sure they are doctrinally sound and morally fit.

In the province, bishops nominate three candidates for any opening in its four dioceses, thereby screening carefully who might be eligible to become a bishop.

The national church holds a synod every 10 years for 3 days, he said, giving room for less mischief making. By contrast the Episcopal Church holds a general convention every 3 years for 10 days.

Fr. Edwards also noted that in the province churches own their property and can leave at any time. The archbishop of the province, the Rt. Rev.

Robert Morse, also is a rector of a parish.

Many of those present indicated they would join the mission and would help volunteer their services to help the church grow and help its ministries.

Fr. Edwards noted that the flowers on the altar were provided by Fr. Joseph Wilson, a Roman Catholic priest from Whitestone, N.Y., who visited Christ Church, Accokeek last summer "and wrote the best article ever written on what a typical service was like at the parish," he said.

Dr. William R. Gardiner, a former member of Christ Church Accokeek who has joined in the new mission, arranged to have the services at Middleton Hall.

END

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