

THE HAPPY DISCIPLE  
an autobiography of  
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## Ordination

Orville Davidson, Robert Gribbon, John Warren and I were ordained Deacons in All Saints Chapel of Trinity Cathedral, Trenton, N. J. on April 11, 1931, by Bishop Paul Matthews. I



was ordained in cassock, alb, amice, girdle, red stole and a CLERICAL COLLAR! I could hardly bear to take it off, once I was entitled to wear it. A lunch followed the ordination and the Bishop unexpectedly called upon the newly ordained to say a few words. I was caught completely unprepared. I rose and after a few words said, "This is a great day for me and I am grateful to everyone concerned, most of all to my dear parents especially . . ." and stopped short realizing too late that if I said "Mother", Father would feel slighted, or if I said "especially Father", Mother would feel hurt. The audience realized my predicament and agonized with me most sympathetically. After a long pause I finished by saying, "especially BOTH!" and sat down in great relief.

Bishop Matthews asked the Vestry of Trinity Church, Woodbridge, located 21 miles as the crow flies from lower Manhattan, if they would accept me. They had just lost their rector under unhappy circumstances, were desperate, and eagerly agreed. On Saturday, May 23, 1931, I went to Woodbridge, met a number of members, and the next day conducted my first service and preached. I was graduated from the seminary on the following Wednesday.

### Marriage

On Tuesday, June 2, 1931, Catharine Bedlow Fish van Alstyne and I were joined in Holy Matrimony in St. Paul's Church, Kinderhook, New York, where she had been baptized when a baby and confirmed. My father officiated, assisted by the Rector, the Rev. J. C. Jagar. The Rt Rev G. Ashton Oldham, Bishop of Albany, pronounced the blessing. Catharine's sister, Elizabeth, was maid of honor, and another sister, Margaret, and my sister, Mabel, were bridesmaids. Mr. van Alstyne gave his daughter in marriage. My brother, Samuel Gardner, was best man, and William van Alstyne, Jr., Charles Boynton, Sewall Emerson, Robert P. Moore, John R. Ramsey and William Slade were ushers. Since the bride's family had lived in Kinderhook for three centuries, there were so many relatives nearby that invitations to the Church had to be limited to the capacity of the building; many more were invited to the reception afterwards, held in the



fine old home, with refreshments out on the lawn. Both of us were descended from ancestors who had come over on the Mayflower. Bishop Matthews placed his thousand acre estate in Western North Carolina at our disposal and we had a glorious four weeks there.

### First Parish

We returned from our honeymoon at the beginning of July to find the large old three-story rectory not ready. We had no choice but to move in and live in parts of the building while other rooms were made ready. The house was said to have been constructed in 1670 of bricks that crossed the Atlantic as ballast.

The three years in that old parish were exciting and both heartwarming and heartbreaking at the same time. They were certainly the formative years of my ministry. I was young and inexperienced, but I had an impressive supply of enthusiasm, energy and initiative. I was a very happy, hard worker in spite of the difficulties and discouragements. The small congregations those first summer Sundays did not defeat me. They made me spend many hours in parish calling to get people coming back to Church again. One of my early allies was a third-hand Mimeograph machine I bought with my limited funds. I quickly learned how to ink and crank it by hand after producing a stencil on my second-hand typewriter. This inexpensive means of communication (2¢ was still the price of first class postage, but I usually employed penny postal cards!) to every member of the congregation was used frequently and fruitfully.

I was only a deacon; so that my people might receive Holy Communion once a month I exchanged with a nearby priest. Twice that summer parishioners died without the Holy Communion. Once I drove to the Anglo-Catholic parish in Elizabeth, N.J., confident I'd find the reserved sacrament there for such an emergency, but a sign on the locked door stated that the rector was on vacation. I was so frustrated and disheartened to have failed as a deacon to provide Holy Communion for my dying members that I appealed on practical pastoral grounds for permission to reserve the Blessed Sacrament for the use of the



sick and dying even though the Diocese of New Jersey did not make provision for reservation. The Bishop gave permission and personally paid for an aumbry.

Speaking engagements multiplied; you know how it is: a new man comes to town and everyone wants to have him as a speaker at his or her club. We had no car at first, but the Rev. Charles Johnson persuaded his aunt to give us her open 1918 Model T Ford. And speaking of gifts, I shall never forget driving down Fifth Avenue, New York, in the pouring rain in our ancient Model T with no top while Catharine held an umbrella over us and the wedding gifts we were hoping to exchange at Tiffany's, with other people honking at us until they saw my clerical collar!

My father gave me a Quiet Day on October 27th and the most memorable advice he gave me: "Don't let people push you around or bluff you out of doing what your conscience bids you do for Christ and His Church." Robert Gribbon, John Warren and I were ordained Priests on October 28, 1931, in old downtown Trinity Cathedral, Trenton, where I had served my last two Princeton years on Sundays. We three gave our priestly blessings after the service. The next morning I celebrated my first Eucharist in Trinity Church, Woodbridge, with my own father serving me. Many people wanted to know how I wished to be addressed now that I was a priest. My predecessor had insisted on being called "Father"; some had refused, others had resented it. I delighted everyone by telling the congregation they could call me "Mister", "Father" or anything else except "Doctor" or "Reverend." They could suit themselves. The result was that since I did not insist, but indicated that I preferred "Father", 99% called me "Father" from then on.

Parish calling was one of my top priorities; I was indefatigable as a caller on regular members, those who had lapsed, on prospects, the sick, the shut-in, and even people in the hospital who apparently did not belong to anybody else.

One of our oldest members, Miss Jane Lodge, came to have a deep dislike for me: "this young whippersnapper Welles who calls himself 'Father' and changes everything around." She stopped coming to Church, but faithfully sent her offering



envelopes each week with another member. I kept praising her behind her back for her loyalty in continuing to send her money, and in time she came to accept me and when I resigned, no one was more sorry to see me leave.

Hugh Williamson Kelly was the wealthy Junior Warden and lay pope of the congregation. He had me call at his office once a week for instructions and advice. He always called me "Edward" in a condescending way. Almost all of his ideas were good and I gratefully accepted them. My first baptism was his granddaughter. I taught that baptisms should be in the Church; he wanted it in the home. He won that round, because the baby took sick and I did not want to risk having the baby get worse by being brought to the Church. After I had been rector a year I began introducing the prayers after the third collect in Morning Prayer to alert the congregation to what was about to be prayed for. Mr Kelly dressed me down sharply and told me not to do it again. I thanked him for his advice, but said I'd think it over. The following week in his office I told him most people found it helpful and I would continue it for the present. Mr Kelly was furious and said that if I did not care to follow his advice, I could get along without his financial support. I was shocked but replied, "Yes, we can get along without your financial support, but you cannot get along without God's Church." It was a draw. He came to church and vestry meetings regularly, but contributed not a cent. My predecessor had received \$2,600. I was called at \$2,000 which now had to be cut to \$1,600 a year. Mrs Kelly died and was buried. I insisted on a pall at all funerals and no flowers on the casket so that persons poor or wealthy looked alike in God's House, whether the coffin under the pall cost little or much. Well, Mr Kelly insisted on flowers on that coffin, so we compromised: the huge spray of flowers was on top of the casket and the purple pall on top of all. As it came up the aisle during the funeral it looked as if Mrs Kelly's body was on top of the casket under the pall! It was so awful that no one ever again in my rectorship insisted on having flowers on the coffin.

Skip this paragraph if you do not care for statistics:



During my three years in the Diocese of New Jersey, the largest number of confirmations reported in any parish was the 46 in Woodbridge. Our parish record had been 19 in 1883. Now we had 10, 46 and 37 in successive years. The breakdown of 46: 24 adults (13 men, 11 women), 22 children (15 boys, 7 girls). Communicants increased from 171 to 284; attendance from 5,498 to 10,601; communions from 862 to 2251. Many factors contributed to this growth record. Not the least was holding two annual every member canvasses: one in the autumn for pledges, one in the Lenten season that was a visitation program to get better acquainted and to listen for criticisms and suggestions.

I read voraciously; my Journal lists 39 books read in 1932 that included such a varied diet as:

Dana, Two Years Before the Mast; William Temple, Christian Faith and Life; Kenneth Kirk, Moral Theology; Buttrick, Jesus Came Preaching; Lloyd Douglas, Magnificent Obsession; Stevenson, Kidnapped; Benito Cellini, Autobiography; Frost, Art of Mental Prayer; Hemingway, Farewell to Arms; Benet, John Brown's Body; Noel, Story of Everest. In the winter of 1932-33 Catharine and I read 32 books out loud to each other.

We kept hoping for children, but none arrived. Catharine was educational secretary for the Woman's Auxiliary of the parish and she started a Camp Fire Girls group. I was very active with acolytes, and took them to Holy Cross Monastery for two days and to Princeton football games as well as to acolyte services in the diocese.

The Great Depression was bad when I came to Woodbridge in 1931, but it became steadily worse. By the autumn of 1932 the parish had hundreds of dollars of unpaid bills; my stipend check was sometimes quite late. We ate sparingly. I recall having twelve for dinner one Sunday and making a small roast chicken stretch to serve the whole dozen and grateful for that. More than one-third of our township population was on relief rolls. We had frequent money-raising projects and at the every member canvass we promised a set of envelopes to everyone who pledged so everyone could put something on the offering plate at services. We had urged people out of work to pledge hours of labor. And we shared non-perishable foodstuffs with 19 of our destitute families in the parish. They knew we cared; we tried to help quietly in many ways. I matched jobs parishioners wanted done with skills of other members who were jobless. If financial statistics are considered, I was a failure at Wood-



bridge. The parish budgets we tried to raise decreased steadily: 1932 - \$6,000; 1933 - \$4,200; 1934 - \$3,600.

I did grow somewhat discouraged in 1933. Finances were still getting worse and Junior Warden Kelly was still mad at me and adding to my problems. On May first I took a carfull to the area Mite Box Presentation Service in New Brunswick. Bishop Casady of Oklahoma preached and after the service during the refreshment period urged me to come out and work in Oklahoma. I was receptive and shortly thereafter received a call to Okmulgee at a larger stipend. I saw my bishop soon afterwards and he said he'd understand if I accepted a call elsewhere. That same month Father came to Trinity, Woodbridge, to celebrate his 40th anniversary as a deacon and I told him of the call to Oklahoma. He urged me to stay where I was. He followed up with a strong letter which I quote at length because it was one of the most important I've ever received in its lasting influence on my life:

"It is the effect on you and CVAW that I'm thinking of more than Woodbridge, if you should leave there at this juncture. The feeling that if you don't get on in one place you can pull out and go to some other place, and having failed in one place it isn't so serious to fail in another. Whereas if you win out in a hard place, it gets your guts shaped up for winning anywhere. If happiness is all that you and CVAW are seeking in the work, I'm afraid you've a disappointing life ahead of you. I imagine most Priests have, much of the time, that same baffled feeling that our Lord had, 'O faithless & perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?' And even to His chosen ones He had constantly to reprove their unbelief and unwillingness to understand His teaching, saying to St. Peter, 'Get thee behind Me, Satan, thou art an offence to Me. For thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.' . . . I hope you give up all thought of Okmulgee."

I stayed in Woodbridge; Father was right; I have been stronger ever since. And the situation began to improve with my own determination to work things through. One day the next winter I heard the doorbell ring and when I opened the door there was Hugh Williamson Kelly. "Come in, Mr Kelly," said I, taking his hand. When he had taken a chair, he began, "I was too hasty a year or so ago, and I've come to ask you to forgive me, forget, and be friends again." I grabbed his hand with considerable emotion and told him what bigness in a man



it takes to do what he had just done, and assured him we'd be very good friends.

Mrs Hodson had for some time urged Catharine and me to visit the Holy Land on the grounds that a priest's ministry would be greatly enriched by firsthand acquaintance with the sites of our Lord's earthly life and ministry. Her generosity made this possible. The Bishop and Vestry both approved leave from April 20 to August 2. After Easter, 1934, in the midst of a round of bon voyage parties, I was called to become Chaplain of St Mark's School, Southborough, Massachusetts. Not wanting this decision to hang over me, I drove up to confer with Headmaster Francis Parkman and Bishop Henry K. Sherrill. The day before we sailed I sent a letter to every member of the Trinity congregation telling them that the night before I had given my resignation to the Vestry at their bon voyage party. It was a bad time yet gave the Vestry several months to select a successor before I left in September for St. Mark's School.