



Dealing With Change

Suburban flight began shrinking the St. Mark's congregation in the 1960s just as it was plaguing downtown merchants. Suburban churchgoers were finding new suburban churches just as shoppers were moving to new suburban malls, which, like the new churches, offered plenty of the free parking that could not be matched downtown.

With free parking ended on nearby Auditorium Circle, daily parking for staff began costing St. Mark's nearly \$10,000 a year. Shuttle buses had to ferry diners from distant lots to Lenten Luncheons to keep the luncheons going. In 1988, a Parking Lot Task Force began negotiating purchase of nearby tracts that could be combined into larger lots, raising enough funds to complete the project successfully five years later.

Other urban problems remained to be dealt with. Ministries were formed to aid the homeless, some of whom were drifting across from Travis Park and sleeping on church sidewalks in the path of churchgoers. Vestry members were assigned to check the church and parish hall for vagrants prior to locking up on Sundays.

Declining membership and finances were reversed under the Rev. James Folts, but church buildings had deteriorated to the point that permits for even minor renovations to the parish hall could not be approved due to larger building code violations. Under the Rev. Michael Chalk, a \$15 million comprehensive upgrade of the entire physical plant achieved renovation of the parish hall complex by the time of the St. Mark's sesquicentennial in 2008. That included installation of a highly rated Kegg organ console, upgraded during a historically sensitive restoration of the nave seven years later.

With all that taken care of, St. Mark's had fewer distractions from its focus on fulfilling its mission statement as "a downtown church, committed to the Gospel, accountable to each other, loving Christ and making him known."

Written by Lewis Fisher from his book *St. Mark's Episcopal Church: 150 Years of Ministry in Downtown San Antonio*