

A Brief History of Holy Comforter



2701 Park Road – 1954 to present

The worshipping community of The Church of the Holy Comforter has met continuously since the birth of the Episcopal mission on March 5, 1903. Worship services were initially held in commercial facilities located in Dilworth, a then-developing suburban neighborhood located at the end of the electric streetcar line from downtown Charlotte. During the next one hundred years, the Holy Comforter congregation constructed church buildings at two additional Dilworth locations: 1506 South Boulevard (formerly The Boulevard); and 2701 Park Road (formerly Avondale Avenue).

Holy Comforter was organized by Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire, of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, in response to a petition from thirty-one residents of Dilworth. The petition was also supported by the Reverend George M. Tolson, archdeacon for diocesan missionary work in Mecklenburg County and, from 1903-1904, Holy Comforter's first priest.

Groundbreaking ceremonies at Holy Comforter's South Boulevard location were held on August 6, 1909, and the to-be-constructed church was designed as the "Bishop Thomas Atkinson Memorial." Bishop Atkinson presided over the Diocese of North Carolina from 1853 to 1881, and during Reconstruction he

effectively promoted the reconciliation of Northern and Southern Episcopal churches.

By 1911, the crypt (basement) of the new church had been constructed, and the congregation began meeting in the Sunday school rooms located there. On March 2, 1913, the first worship services were held in the church that had been built above the crypt. Four priests served as Rector on South Boulevard: the Reverend Francis M. Osborne (1904-1916); the Reverend Robert B. Owens (1916-1946); the Reverend Iveson B. Noland (1946-1950); and the Reverend Joseph L. Kellerman (1950-1958).

At mid-century, the growing commercial character of South Boulevard and congregational needs for space induced Holy Comforter to acquire land on Park Road and begin construction of new church buildings. The first Park Road worship services were held on October 10, 1954, in a newly constructed parish hall. On August 18, 1957, the church itself was dedicated in ceremonies led by Bishop Edwin A. Penick. A few years later, on March 8, 1964, it was consecrated by Bishop Richard H. Baker. Several architectural and liturgical features of the South Boulevard church were incorporated into the Park Road church, including: the marble altar, the altar cross; and the Tiffany-designed stained glass chancel window. Four priests have served as Rector on Park Road: the Reverend Floyd W. Finch, Jr. (1959-1967); the Reverend Alwin Reiners, Jr. (1968-1979); the Reverend G. Kenneth G. Henry (1980-1997); and the Reverend David B. Hodges (1999-2008). The Reverend John E. Shields is currently serving as Interim Rector. Since 1958, fifteen additional men and women have served the parish in other clergy roles.

The Charlotte community currently receives the benefits and blessings of several long-standing ministries begun at Holy Comforter: Boy Scout Troop No. 1 (1917); the Holy Comforter Weekday School (1955); and the Charlotte Loaves and Fishes program (1975). In addition, throughout its history, Holy Comforter has raised up countless men and women, both lay and clergy, to provide leadership for the Charlotte community and for the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina.