Building The Goodly Fellowship Of Faith

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Introduction

The past does not repeat itself, but sometimes it rhymes.
—Mark Twain

The past draws us to it like a magnet, and a question many new church members soon ask is, “What is the history of the Episcopal Church in this place?” The obvious first response in Utah is to read the *Reminiscences of a Missionary Bishop* by Daniel S. Tuttle, the territory’s first missionary bishop, who arrived by stagecoach in July 1867. The Tuttle work is remarkable; the quality of its travel writing belongs with the best products of the nineteenth century, but the book is over a century old, and only parts of it are about Utah. Tuttle had a vast missionary district including Montana and Idaho, and in 1886 left Utah to become bishop of Missouri and, through seniority, presiding bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States from 1903 until his death in 1923. Abiel Leonard, Tuttle’s successor as bishop from 1888 to 1903, was a less colorful figure who worked hard and consolidated the gains of Tuttle’s time, and advanced them as means would allow.

Then came another commanding presence and gifted writer, Franklin Spencer Spalding, bishop from 1904 until his tragic death in September 1914. He was killed by a speeding motorist while crossing a Salt Lake City street at night. Spalding’s short book on Mormonism and extensive writings on Christian socialism made him a national figure. Spalding was also opposed to American participation in World War I. His successor, Paul Jones, 1914–1918, was added to the Calendar of the Episcopal Church for his witness to peace during World War I.

Jones was a socialist and pacifist whom the leadership of St. Mark’s Cathedral parish and St. Paul’s parish sought to remove, with the support
of Tuttle, by then head of the Episcopal Church in America. Jones resigned on December 20, 1917, effective April 11, 1918, but the question is—what would the church have done had he not resigned? Jones steadfastly held to a defensible Christian position, had strong support among the non-Salt Lake City clergy and laity, and was a gifted pastor and administrator. A bishop could be tried for heresy or immorality, but Jones was never formally charged with anything.

The 1920s and 1930s especially were a hard time for the church. Bishop Arthur W. Moulton, 1920–1946, struggled to keep church doors open and salaries paid. A World War I veteran, Moulton was also an advocate for peace with the Soviet Union, and to his surprise and everybody in Utah’s, was one of the first recipients of the Stalin Peace Prize in 1951. Three peace activist bishops in a row for Utah.

Bishop Stephen C. Clark, 1946–1950, had impressive postwar plans for the church in a growing state. His annual convocation reports were filled with vision and energy, but he died after a few years in office. His successor, Richard S. Watson, 1951–1971, a sometime actor and former attorney, was the last of the missionary bishops. Watson was a highly popular figure who drew on Clark’s planning and built several new churches with limited resources during the state’s expansive postwar growth period. In 1971 the national church abolished missionary districts in favor of independent dioceses, and the Utah church was cut loose to function on its own.

In the juvenescence of the newly independent Diocese’s life in 1971 came a new bishop, Otis Charles, heralded by trumpets, balloons and firecrackers at his consecration. It was the 1970s. There was never a dull moment in his time, one in which the new Utah diocese successfully confronted most issues facing the modern church, including the introduction of the new prayer book and hymnal, the ordination of clergy for limited local ministries, the place of women clergy in the ordained ministry, and the church as a moral voice on issues from capital punishment to the Vietnam War. Charles accepted a prestigious appointment as dean of the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1986, “came out” as a gay man, and on retiring divorced his wife of many years and later took a male partner at a church ceremony in San Francisco.

The autocratic George E. Bates followed as second bishop of the independent diocese, 1986–1996, and represented a difference in style and substance from his predecessor. Shortly after his arrival Bates sold St. Mark’s Hospital on December 31, 1987, for nearly 100 million dollars (the exact sum was always at issue) and the diocese went from poverty to affluence overnight. Bates hired a staff of twenty-four persons for a diocese of twenty-one churches. Visions of shared mission and examples of sustained local
stewardship in the small, struggling diocese gave way to a dependence on seeking monies from the bishop.

This story ends with the consecration of a Utah native and one of the Episcopal Church’s first women bishops, Carolyn Tanner Irish, on May 31, 1996, as bishop coadjutor (assistant bishop with the right of succession). On June 29, 1996, with Bates’s retirement, she became the diocese’s tenth bishop. Born into a prominent LDS family of educators, studies at Stanford, Michigan, and Oxford universities led Irish to the Episcopal Church, and to work with the Shalem Institute and several parishes in Michigan and the Washington, D. C., area, including Washington National Cathedral. Since I am married to Bishop Irish, this history of the diocese’s first 130 years concludes at the time of her consecration.

Boundaries of the large diocese shifted during its history and only in the twentieth century were state and missionary district coterminous. The original Missionary District of Montana, Idaho, and Utah existed from 1867 to 1880. Next it was the Missionary District of Idaho and Utah, 1880–1886, followed by the Missionary District of Nevada and Utah, 1886–1898. The Missionary District of Salt Lake, 1898–1907, became the Missionary District of Utah from 1907 to 1971, when Utah became an independent diocese. The state’s southeast corner was ceded to a separate Navajoland Area Mission in 1977.

What does the historian of a church write about? At first, I resisted building this work around the tenure of Utah’s bishops. The arguments can be anticipated; it would call undue attention to them, the church is more than bishops, etc. But the problem is that the small, isolated church in Utah was centered on its bishops. They were its public figures, policy makers, and fundraisers; they had the power given them by virtue of their office in an episcopal, not a congregational church, and left the most extensive records of the church in their time.

This is a work of analysis by an independent scholar and historian, and not an official or commissioned institutional history. There is a tendency in older “official” church histories to write as if the participants were all saints, or at least Sunday school merit badge winners, but anyone who has read or written other forms of history knows that human motives range from altruistic to self-serving. I have described the times, events, and personalities as written sources and, in later times, written sources and oral interviews would allow. In such a process the historian both searches and evaluates at every level, determining which documents to use, what information to extract from them, what to say about an issue, person, or institution. This
does not mean being bland and indecisive; human motives are complex and issues, especially the kinds churches deal with, are notoriously untidy. At the same time, it is the historian’s task to assemble a full spread of facts about participants while painting a picture of them that is fair, if not always flattering.

Also, the historical narrative emerges out of the materials available to the historian, and not from what the historian wishes they would say. It is not a question of bringing a predetermined point of view to the subject, then finding facts to support it. Instead, the challenge is to take the source materials—archival records, newspaper accounts, and the testimony of oral witnesses for later periods—and ask the question, “What do they tell us?” Several people told me that Bishop Arthur W. Moulton was the only highly placed Utah church leader to condemn the lynching of an itinerant African American coal miner, Robert Marshall, who was killed in Price, Utah, on June 18, 1925. It would have been like Moulton to speak out on such an issue, consistent with the outspokenness of the Episcopal Church on racial injustice, and a tribute to his civic courage, which he frequently demonstrated elsewhere.

The only problem was there was no written evidence that Moulton said anything at all about the Marshall lynching. I read and reread his convocation addresses of the period, consulted other historians, and worked the University of Utah’s aging microfilm viewing machines while pouring over photographed reels of old newspapers of the time. All I found was a letter from Moulton to the governor’s office asking what he should tell the national church if they asked about the state’s position on Marshall’s lynching.

Those who look for a history of every parish, clergy member, and building improvement should return this book immediately to its shelf. Not every parish or priest was included, due often to a lack of documentation and space.¹ Many laity and clergy’s lives contributed to the larger picture of the church, but only traces of their stories remain. I wish I could have found Harriet Tuttle’s letters to her traveling husband, or the letters of Katherine Murray, who ministered in adverse, isolated conditions in Whiterocks in the early twentieth century, or the papers of William F. Bulkley, who spent over fifty years in Provo and Salt Lake City, and went everywhere by rickety auto, keeping small congregations together in the 1920s, ’30s, and ’40s. The history of the Episcopal Church in Utah would have gained another valuable source document, Arthur S. Moulton’s autobiography, if a relative had not burned it.

Utah is a young diocese, independent for only three decades at this writing. Archives were not extensive for many parish churches. Outside of
Salt Lake City, documentary sources were plentiful in Ogden and Logan, less so elsewhere. Information on construction or improvements to buildings was more readily available than details about what clergy preached or taught. But it is a boring book that begins, “This church was built in 1905, the stained glass window was added in 1910, and the roof repaired three years later.”

Tuttle and Spalding were the two coordinates around which future episcopates coalesced. Both were high energy, strong personalities, outspoken, in Tuttle’s case, as a missionary bishop literally building a church from nothing, and in the instance of Spalding, as the moral conscience of the wider church on social issues. Yet the tendency of the Utah church was to want a pastoral, less publicly visible bishop to follow an activist one. Thus Leonard came after Tuttle, the affable Moulton followed Jones, and Bates, who rarely spoke out on issues, succeeded the outspoken Charles.

In Utah, the church encountered an unusual range of local, national, and international issues: potentially tense relations with the Latter-day Saints, encounters with the state’s dwindling Native American populations, World War I, socialism and pacifism, Prohibition, the Great Depression, World War II, responses to population growth, ministry to first Japanese then Hispanic communities, political issues with moral implications like the Vietnam War, and wider questions close to home like nuclear testing, dumping nuclear waste in the Utah desert, and the planned deployment of the MX missile defense system within the state. In short, Utah was a microcosm, responding to or reflecting most topics facing the larger church. Surprisingly absent were any voiced concerns about the environment, despite the state being both a major mining center and a source of unsurpassed natural beauty and ecological complexity.

While I originally wondered if material was adequate to write a history of the Episcopal Church in Utah, an abundance of topics and sources emerged. When the Vernal opera house owner of an earlier era said Episcopalians could use his premises any time because “the Episcopals were ladies and gentlemen and didn’t spit all over the floor,” he uttered a truth about that denomination. Episcopalians are a highly literate church population that leave a significant paper trail, but are rarely demonstrative. God’s chosen frozen, we have been called. Months were spent with nearly sixty boxes of diocesan archives in the Special Collections of the J. Willard Marriott Library of the University of Utah and the more than fifty boxes at the Utah State University Library Special Collections and Archives in Logan. This gave me a solid base from which to begin writing. The tiny scrawl of the former diocesan historiographer, Professor Harold Dalgliesh, not only pointed me to many valuable documents, but his carefully organized work made it easy
for a later generation of researchers to find what they need quickly. A. J. Simmonds, his successor, was also skilled in finding and commenting on documents. Gradually the picture took shape.

Serendipitously, sources emerged from unexpected places. John Dixon Stewart shared his choice library of historic Utah original editions with me. David Jones, son of Bishop Paul Jones, and his wife, Pat, arrived in Utah with a car full of documents on Paul Jones. They were retracing the journey of David’s famous father, and had collected material in Scranton, Pennsylvania; New Haven, Connecticut; Antioch, Ohio; and other cities where Utah’s fourth bishop had worked. Jane Moulton Stahl asked what she could do with her collection of papers from her grandfather, Bishop Arthur W. Moulton, including a copy of his FBI file. Thelma Ellis lent me her pale blue 1950s traveling case filled with original documents and photographs carefully collected over more than seventy years at Good Shepherd, Ogden. Francis L. Winder gave me over a hundred early black and white photos carefully mounted on display board by his predecessor as archdeacon, William F. Bulkley, who lived in Utah for fifty-eight years and carefully depicted the story of the church and its times for use in lectures. I wanted to share my findings with parishes, and did so at “History Days” in places like St. John’s, Logan, and St. Michael’s, Brigham City, where carefully preserved material from earlier times emerged from trunks and attics, and the memories of participants.

I wish I could meet graduate students seeking a thesis topic or colleagues looking for a next book to write. One ready topic is *The Life and Writings of Daniel S. Tuttle*. Tuttle was a giant of the church in nineteenth-century America, and his *Reminiscences* only scratch the surface. A person of spiritual depth and thoughtfulness, he deserves a modern biography. He belongs with such other formative figures in the early life of the Episcopal Church in America as James Lloyd Breck, “The Apostle of the Wilderness,” which is how Minnesota and Wisconsin were once known, Jackson Kemper, who worked extensively in the mid- and southwest and established missions among Native Americans in Missouri, and John Henry Hobart, whose work in upstate New York in the first half of the nineteenth century paralleled Tuttle’s in Utah in the century’s second half. Breck, Kemper, and Hobart have found places in the Episcopal Church’s calendar of exemplary figures; a case can be made as well for including Tuttle in their numbers.

Another subject is the *Life of Franklin Spencer Spalding, Bishop and Socialist*. Spalding was every bit as richly textured and memorable as Tuttle, but belongs to a different era. A third study might be *Paul Jones, Pacifist and Pastor*. Jones merits a more extended study than he has received to date. Generally known for his conflict with church leadership over World War I,
he was also a tireless visitor to small missions and commentator on the larger issues facing the church.

H. Baxter Liebler was a quirky character with a long, colorful ministry among the Navajo. He was likewise a pioneer in reversing the extant church policy toward Native Americans, and his writings were extensive. More modern subjects might include a biography of Otis Charles, whose episcopate contended with most of the structural, political, liturgical, and sexual issues facing the church. Another topic is the sale of St. Mark’s Hospital and its financial consequences, and how that changed the character of the diocese. In short, the Utah Diocese contained an unusually high number of interesting bishops and issues. Jones made it to the Episcopal Church’s Calendar, listing historic and more modern people who led exemplary lives of witness to their beliefs. But many would argue that, in addition to the obviously qualified Tuttle, Spalding and Liebler were equally deserving of commemoration for their sustained witness in their own times.

Other, broader topics emerge. Men wrote most of the documents about the church and occupied the ecclesial offices until recent times, but it was often women who held the church together. They raised the money, a dime here and a dollar there, to build churches, buy organs, and furnish rectories. They read Morning Prayer in vacant parishes, taught generations of Sunday school students the basics of the faith, visited the sick, comforted the dying, cooked the parish meals that were the basis of fellowship, and adorned simple country altars with flowers and fair linen cloths. Some, like Sara Napper in Salt Lake City and Lucy Carter and Katherine Murray on the Ute reservations, worked long years in demanding or isolated settings at half the salary their male counterparts received. It is to them that I dedicate this book.

Another study could be the Native American work of the Episcopal Church in Utah. There was Liebler in the south among the Navajo in the 1940s and 1950s and Milton Hersey earlier to the east among the Utes, but that is by no means the whole story. Liebler was an accommodationist, an ultra-high-churchman coexisting in the same hogan with traditional Navajo healers, while Hersey, with utter sincerity, tried to dismantle major local rites like the Sun Dance, not realizing their importance to Native American society. It is a sad and difficult history to write, a story of Native Americans’s lands being seized, people being subjugated and betrayed through broken treaties, and their own religion misunderstood and culture denigrated. In this the Episcopal Church was the willing or thoughtless co-agent with the government, “elevating the Red Man” on the one hand while on the other suppressing traditional structures that had provided social and cultural cohesion.
Building the “Goodly Fellowship of Faith”

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Writing a history of the Episcopal Church in Utah was a different challenge for a historian whose earlier books were about religion, law, and history in other contexts. As I assembled a timeline of people, institutions, and issues on the Church in Utah, oral interviews led to additional information. Such interviews were structured around dates, such as events in the life of a particular parish, or a subject, like the introduction of locally ordained clergy into the ministry of the church. They also provided an opportunity for significant and insightful participants to recall past eras in the life of the church.

This project became a race against the clock when one valuable source, Robert Gordon, the close associate of Bishops Charles and Bates, died before I could interview him, and another, Thelma Ellis, the living memory of Church of the Good Shepherd, Ogden, was stricken ill on the eve of our planned encounter. Still other persons moved away, became ill, or no longer remembered events in which they had participated. In some sessions I asked an elderly person to give an even approximate date of an event, but memories had faded with age. A line from the hymn “O God, Our Help in Ages Past” suggests the transitory nature of the historian’s enterprise: “Time like an ever rolling stream bears all our years away: they fly, forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.”

Western history, Utah history in particular, was a new subject for me. Except for brief exposure to the “frontier thesis” arguments of a bygone era, I knew little of such history, and less about Utah, which I imagined to be the history of Latter-day Saints arriving by covered wagon and the subsequent battles over theocracy and polygamy. Regional history has undergone the evolution all historical research and writing has experienced in recent decades, including greater use of anthropological source materials, exploration of minority and gender issues, the integration of cultural activities into the study of history, and the balancing of individual biography and institutional life in historical narratives. Numerous accounts on Latter-day Saints history have been written that have little bearing on the history of the Episcopal Church in Utah. Less well known but no less important is the work of a recent generation of Utah social historians writing on non-Mormon populations and issues. Many such persons gave generously of their time and insights in the completion of this project, and I acknowledge their contributions.

Religious history, finally, is the history of the encounter of a people with the living God. That is the narrative theme of the Bible. Church history is thus far more than history about buildings, budgets, positions taken on
controversial issues, and membership numbers, although it is also that. What people prayed about and what was preached about in churches is included when available. The powerful description of Bishop Tuttle regarding the ministry of Emily Pearsall (pp. 27–28) and Bishop Jones describing the winter burial of a Native American child on the Ute reservation (pp. 87–88) are two such examples. So is the satisfaction of Sara Napper over a church pageant well done in a small, struggling parish (p. 69), H. Baxter Liebler’s baptism of a Navajo baby (pp. 144–45), and the statement of Bishop Watson, old and tired now, about seeing a new vision of the emerging church under a new generation’s leadership. But the subjects of most people’s intense prayers are infrequently and imperfectly committed to paper. Moments of deep religious encounters are difficult to describe, and are rarely articulated in source documents; when found, they are a pearl of great price.

The joy for most historians comes in shaping their material, deciding how and why things happened as they did, then molding the result into presentable narrative form and sculpting its conclusions. It is also the excitement of a moment of discovery, as in rereading Bishop Tuttle’s description of his encounter with Brigham Young and seeing a meaning in it quite different than that which previous commentators had taken for granted. Or coming upon a letter where Bishop Watson summarized exactly how he saw his delicate relationship with Father Liebler and the Navajo mission. Historical research is also detective work; the researcher sifts patiently through box after box of material for clues, abandons false leads, is satisfied when new material confirms already reached conclusions, and is pleased when new insights are forthcoming that might advance a fuller interpretation. Beyond that I see no grand themes to history; so much of what it is possible to write depends on the materials that are available. Instructive for those who read and write history, or wonder about its real life applicability, is the advice of American historian and one-time Librarian of Congress, Daniel J. Boorstin, “Planning your future without looking at your past is like putting cut flowers into the ground and expecting them to grow.”

This book was written at a time when each day’s news brought accounts of the sexual misadventures of Roman Catholic clergy. Was that a theme in the life of the Episcopal Church in Utah? Since the Archives did not contain individual clergy personnel files, there was little evidence on the subject, except for information about the church trial of the cathedral’s dean on child molestation charges early in the twentieth century, and the Church Army worker on a Ute reservation who was sent to federal prison for child molestation in the 1950s. All Saints’, Salt Lake City, dismissed an associate clergy member for improper sexual activity in the late 1960s, and the parish became divided over how the matter was handled.
More common were cases of poorly paid clergy leaving a string of debts, but, again, few of these made the archives. There were also a fair number of clergy–congregation fallings out, probably no more so than in other places. Clergy–bishop stresses bubbled to the surface at various points, and cathedral–bishop relations were a source of periodic tension as well. Tuttle tried to solve the problem, Leonard alluded to it, Spalding and Jones encountered it, both Moulton and Watson encountered it. And, when the cathedral’s leaders wanted to remove Charles as its rector in the 1970s, the bishop threatened to move his cathedra, or official seat, to St. Stephen’s, West Valley City, a new mission quartered in a temporary cinder block building.

One day in late spring, sitting with piles of documents around me, I happened on the Easter Vigil reading in Ezekiel 37:1–15 about the dry bones coming together in a great rattling noise. That seemed an apt metaphor for the historian’s work, to give the bones of Utah Episcopal Church history a trace of the life they once had, providing such depth as the sources would allow, recreating their life and purpose in a new context. As it happened, on Easter Eve 2004 I visited Thelma Ellis, historian of Good Shepherd Church, Ogden. The sun was setting over the Great Salt Lake; the Christmas poinsettia we had brought her earlier gave way to an Easter lily. Thelma’s treasures surrounded her in the assisted living center high above the town: an early photograph of the church where she had spent her life, her collection of church historical records, a document she was working on in her frail handwriting. “The tumors are spreading, I can’t wear a dress any more,” she said, pointing to the widening stomach of a tiny, frail woman. I asked about some of the church personalities she had known and observed over seventy years. Most of all, I was trying to keep our three-year conversation going. So was Thelma; she gave me a copy of a document, as she did each time we visited. “I may not be here next time you come,” she said matter-of-factly. That night’s Great Vigil of Easter at Good Shepherd began with a collect about hearing “the record of God’s saving deeds in history.” I was asked to read the Dry Bones lesson, that momentous and poetic passage, with a tiny flashlight that cast a faltering blue illumination on perhaps four lines at a time. “Mortal, can these bones live?” Ezekiel is asked. The dry bones in the desert valley rattled and came together, flesh and breath were added, graves opened, and Israel returned to its land. If this work of history helps future readers to find their place in the land, and to give the times, issues, and personalities a momentary breath of life, its purpose will have been amply achieved.