So ends the story, as of 1996, a story of an adventure that began in the summer of 1867 when a dust–covered, pistol-packing eastern bishop arrived by stagecoach in the frontier town of Salt Lake City. The Utah Territory was still under federal occupation; it would not become a state until 1896. Relations with the Latter-day Saints were prickly for decades, but Daniel S. Tuttle, Utah’s first resident Protestant missionary, carved out his own mission strategy, a spiritual and educational presence, alternative to the Latter-day Saints. An indefatigable pastor, traveler, and fundraiser, he built schools, churches, a hospital, and a cathedral before moving on to Missouri in 1886. Tuttle is among the giants of nineteenth-century American religious history.

No less imposing a figure was Franklin Spencer Spalding, bishop from 1904 until his tragic death in 1914. Spalding was a national and international voice for Christian Socialism, who also built churches and expanded the missionary district’s ministry in his time. His successor, Paul Jones, formerly of St. John’s House, Logan, and later archdeacon of the missionary district, lasted only three-and-a-half years as bishop. In an encounter that invites comparison with a Greek tragedy, a hostile local Council of Advice and a timid House of Bishops forced the idealistic Jones to resign in a clash between Christian pacifism and patriotic fervor. Then came the long episcopate of Arthur W. Moulton, 1920–1946. During the Depression years, the church was in a survival mode, but Moulton still expanded activity in several isolated communities and supported Native American work, begun by the Church in the 1890s on the Ute reservations, and was a voice for international cooperation in one of America’s most isolationist states.

The brief episcopate of Stephen Cutter Clark, missionary bishop from 1946 to his death in 1950, show Clark as a careful planner who laid the foundations for the church’s postwar expansion in the growing Salt Lake
City region. Richard S. Watson, lawyer, actor, and bishop, then worked tirelessly from 1951 to 1971 to expand the impoverished missionary district in membership. He caught the rising curve of the postwar population expansion, and many of the most active parishes of later times were built or started on a shoestring in Watson’s time.

Next came two contrasting episcopates, one open, one closed; one communal, one corporate; one poor, one wealthy. Otis Charles, 1971–1986, was a creative figure, long involved in liturgical renewal and church reform movements. It was the 1970s, and the newly independent diocese sped into the modern era while never looking back. With the sale of St. Mark’s Hospital on December 31, 1987 by Bishop George E. Bates, the face of the Utah Diocese changed. Money flowed—the hospital sold for possibly $100 million—but the former closeness of clergy, laity, and bishop was replaced by increasing detachment and competition for funds. When Bates took medical retirement in June 1996, Carolyn Tanner Irish, a Utah native, became the tenth bishop of Utah and third bishop of the independent diocese.

What are the main conclusions about the history of the Episcopal Church in Utah? The Episcopal Church represented a number of firsts: the first permanent non-LDS religious presence in Utah, beginning in May 1867; the first non-LDS private schools in Utah, also in 1867; the first non-Mormon church building in Utah, Good Samaritan, Corrine, in June 1869; the first non-LDS church building in Salt Lake City, St. Mark’s Cathedral, whose cornerstone was laid on July 30, 1870; and the first modern hospital between Denver and San Francisco, in 1872. It was also among the first American dioceses to make widespread use of the ministries of locally ordained clergy in the 1970s. But “firsts” are not ends in themselves, only road markers pointing the direction of history’s trails.

As for the Episcopal Church in Utah:

—Its numbers were always small, slightly over five hundred communicants in 1886, and slightly over five thousand a century later. In a state of nearly 85,000 square miles, its twenty-plus churches and chapels always maintained their distinctive character—small, enthusiastic islands in the shadow of the Latter-day Saints culture surrounding them.

—Episcopal Church attitudes toward Native Americans mirrored their times. Bishop Leonard began church efforts to “elevate the Red Man” in 1895. Milton J. Hersey actively introduced modern educational and farming methods to the Utes, and simultaneously contributed to the destruction of traditional Ute culture through suppression of the Sun Dance, a unifying force for many Utes. Meanwhile, a small but loyal cadre of Native American
Episcopalian emerged, and kept the reservation churches functioning. Some missionaries, like Buckaroo Joe Hogben at St. Elizabeth’s and H. Baxter Liebler at St. Christopher’s, were remembered for their support of indigenous culture and life.

—In most parishes women were, then as now, the main fundraisers, teachers, cooks, altar guild members, musicians, and visitors to the sick and grieving. Only gradually were they admitted to governing councils and ordination. For example: Bishop Paul Jones’s proposal to make women convocation delegates was rejected in 1915; it was not until 1934, during the height of the Depression, that two women of means were elected to St. Mark’s Cathedral vestry. Yet, from earliest times, women missionaries were active in Utah. Sara Napper worked as a teacher and church worker from 1892 until 1927, when she retired at age eighty-two. No less effective were several women reservation workers, in the early twentieth century among the Utes, and among the Navajo in the 1940s and 1950s.

—Its basic relationship with the dominant culture was one of wary tolerance, and sometimes-vocal conflict on both sides in the early years; and little contact in the later years. Tuttle, Spalding, and Jones publicly challenged Mormon beliefs. Tuttle declined to welcome Latter-day Saints to communion, and Watson would not accept Mormon baptism, but Episcopalians generally coexisted with their more numerous neighbors and increasingly welcomed avenues of cooperative action.

—Despite the tragic conflict between Bishop Paul Jones and the missionary district’s Council of Advice in 1917 over pacifism and World War I, the Missionary District and later Diocese of Utah was free of religious factionalism and the quarrels that made newspaper headlines elsewhere. Nationally, Utah belongs in the progressive wing of the Episcopal Church. Key changes, like welcoming minorities and women to the ministry, and gays and lesbians to the priesthood, as well as the various Prayer Book and hymnal revisions, were accomplished with relative ease. Despite their geographic isolation, Utah Episcopalians have always been a lively community, willing to try new ideas, sometimes reflecting trends in the wider church, and sometimes affecting the larger church’s life, as in its contributions to the new service for the Burial of the Dead and the Reconciliation of a Penitent in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

—It was decidedly a mission church in its formative years, 1867 to 1920, and then again briefly in the post-World War II period, in the 1950s and 1960s. Largely within those two eras, the Episcopal Church in Utah established nearly a hundred preaching stations, teaching stations, house churches, missions, or parishes. Many of them were short-lived in places like Roosevelt, Green River, Dutch John, or Magna, but others took root.
Amazingly, almost half such communities were founded in the church’s early years, (the 1870s to 1920), when its human and material resources were scantest.

—When “Missionary” went out of the missionary district’s name in 1971, founding new churches ceased to be a priority for the new diocese. No new churches were started under Charles or Bates, although Charles encouraged an already established Mission in Southwestern Utah, primarily a congregation gathering in Cedar City that also worked with Episcopal families in St. George to establish a mission. Bates built or refurbished several church buildings, but started no new mission churches.

—Church numbers did not grow in proportion to the state’s population. If Episcopalians represented one-half of one percent of the population in Charles’s time, they were closer to one-fourth of one percent at century’s end. Church membership numbers had increased slightly, but the state’s population more than doubled in the same period.

—The Church was poor and struggling for most of its history, and did not have a strong base of affluent members or financial resources until the sale of St. Mark’s Hospital in late 1987. Clergy salaries were at most $1,000 in Leonard’s time, and total clergy compensation was $9,700 a century later under Charles. This meant turnover was high, keeping out of debt was a problem for some clergy, and many of the most able clergy took jobs elsewhere.

—The sudden availability of possibly $100 million to the bishop in 1988 was a watershed event, resulting in a before and after diocese. Money-related issues became a leverage point in clergy–episcopal relations. Among parishes, a “let the Diocese do it” attitude grew in communities that formerly worked hard to raise money locally. Congregational giving, generally representing less than ten percent of parish budgets, remained flat or declined, for example, totaling $285,000 in 1988; $228,277 in 1991.

—Clergy pay, once among the nation’s lowest, became among the nation’s highest. Average Utah full-time annual clergy compensation was $64,596 in 2002, placing the diocese in the top decile nationally at a time when average national full-time clergy compensation was $56,930.¹

—Many of Utah’s bishops were outspoken. Tuttle articulated his needs for the missionary district, and laid bare the flaws of Mormonism as he saw them. Spalding wrote at length on the Social Gospel and Christian Socialism. Jones was both an articulate Socialist and a pacifist. Moulton was an early supporter of the United Nations. Charles led church opposition to MX missile deployment in Utah, and supported gay rights. Parenthetically, the environment as a religious issue, so evident a concern in a state like Utah, was not addressed by the Episcopal Church until the late twentieth century.
Wesley Frensdorff, dean of St. Mark’s Cathedral in the 1960s, reflected his Utah experiences when he called for a church where “each congregation is in mission and each Christian, gifted for ministry; a crew on a freighter, not passengers on a luxury liner. Peacemakers and healers abhorring violence in all forms, as concerned with societal healing as with individual healing; with justice as with freedom, prophetically confronting the root causes of social, political, and economic ills.”

For isolated parishes of the Utah Episcopal Church, where a congregation of thirty-five persons represented a good turnout on most Sundays, the tension between biblical demands and local realities was reflected in the activities of its members. They visited or prayed for the sick, buried the dead, and comforted those who mourned. As a community, the church welcomed children into its midst, and provided a place where they could feel important as students, singers, and acolytes. It welcomed newcomers who might arrive with questions, having recently moved to Utah, or those leaving “the dominant religion.”

A place for joyful celebrations during festive and solemn seasons, its choirs sang their best anthems and favorite hymns. The church drew Christians to the liturgical year, from Advent through Pentecost, connecting them to the wider church through time and eternity. When a St. Paul’s, Salt Lake City, vestry report noted after a 1918 service, “the choir never in its career did better work,” it echoed a widespread aspiration of other parishes. The Episcopal churches were a gathering place for community groups and Bible study, and for potlucks and fellowship meals to reduce the cultural and geographical isolation. The “miles of fund-raising spaghetti and gallons of spaghetti sauce” that the Church of the Resurrection, Bountiful, prepared, as did twenty-some other parishes, strengthened bonds of intergenerational fellowship, and the modest but constant sums of money raised built churches, sent children to camp, or helped the needy at home and abroad.

The church was a place to speak out freely on social and political issues such as war, gun control, immigration, capital punishment, civil rights, and the place of women in society and/or the place of persons of same-sex orientation in the wider life of the community. Finally, it was a prayerful setting where members realized the sad cost of divisions, and the joy of a purposeful community gathering to happily proclaim the news of the “goodly fellowship” in Christ.

The Church must become Christian, and, therefore, missionary in its real essence. It must realize it can only know the Doctrine by doing the work. The Church’s history, its form of government, its liturgical services offer constant temptation to waste time and thought and dissipate energy. Just
as truly as the individual must forget himself in the cause to which he
is devoted, if he is to advance the interests of that cause, so the Church
must forget herself, her boastings about her Catholic heritage, her efforts
to perfect her liturgical forms, her fussing over already too complicated
national, Provincial, and Diocesan organization and make it her one and
only duty to keep her members to be like Jesus Christ, who lived and
died to save men from sin and all the misery which sin creates. She must
realize that the only reason there is a Church is that collective action is
more efficient than individual action. We in Utah are a feeble folk and
we have little or no influence over the Church at large—but we can do
our duty in the little sphere of service to which Christ has called us.¹

—Bishop Franklin Spencer Spalding, convention address, 1914