

William Hooper Gleason

Thu OCT 3 – Sun OCT 6, 2013

W e r g e r s ' G u i l d
o f t h e
E p i s c o p a l C h u r c h
25th A N N I V E R S A R Y
C O N F E R E N C E
F o u n d e r s E v e n i n g

ST. GEORGE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

NASHVILLE TENNESSEE

THURSDAY OCTOBER 3 2013

Welcome to the Twenty-Fifth (25th) Anniversary **Vergers' Guild of the Episcopal Church** Annual Conference.

I welcome each and every one of you to **this** extraordinary gathering, that began here at St. George's Episcopal Church in the Nave, where we have just heard a Glorious EvenSong, presented by the wonderful St. George's Choir, and into this room, Hampton Hall, the former St George's sanctuary, from where I verged for the first time, leading the St. George's Choir, and Parish, and Clergy from here, outside, and around to the new Sanctuary, in 1986. Next door, the multi-functional room, where there is a Sunday "modern", family & youth, Liturgy service now, is named for the former Rector of St. George's, The Reverend Canon James Lawrence Johnson, my priest, my friend and mentor, who asked me to be the first Verger at St George's, and without whom this **Guild** would not have started, at least under my perseverance. Father Johnson invited me into his office one day back in 1986, and asked to be the Verger for St. George's. I questioned, "*What is a Verger?*", and he told me to go look it up in the dictionary, encyclopedia, and contact the Church of England. I did, and that is how it all started.

Three (3) years later, Tuesday, November 28th thru Thursday, November 30th (*The Feast Day of St Andrew*), 1989, twenty-nine (29) Vergers from the United States and three (3) from England converged here to **found** the **Vergers' Guild of the Episcopal Church**, along with the honored presence of The Right Reverend George Lazenby Reynolds, Jr, Ninth (9th) Bishop of Tennessee, and The Reverend Joseph Leslie Pace, Associate Rector of St. George's, and also, a couple of dozen parishioners of St. George's. Tonight, I especially welcome, and soon you will greet, those Founders that are here again: **John Campbell, Thomas Cameron, David Jette, Kent Wingerson, Andrew Morgret, Robert Koppe, and Helen Gleason.**

And I welcome each and every one of you tonight; if I had the time permitted, I would read each of your names now, all two-hundred-thirty-one (231) persons registered to this Twenty-Fifth (25th) Anniversary **Vergers' Guild** Conference 2013. Thank you for coming! I know you are in for an extraordinary weekend of **Ecclesiastical Education, Guild Friendship and Growth**, and Nashville **Entertainment** and Southern Hospitality.

I am asked this question all the time, "*How did the **Guild** start; how did **you** start it?*" And I usually answer that with, "*I had no intention of starting something like this; I just wanted to find out what a "**VERGER**" was and did; and what I was supposed to do. Somewhere along the line, someone sent me five dollars (\$5.00) to help pay some copying and postage expenses, and I haven't stopped since.*"

But, really, **Our Lord, Father, Son, Holy Spirit**, must have done it. I, definitely, had no intentions or ambitions to found an organization devoted to worship and service within the Anglican Communion. If anything, you might have found me today, still involved in, and devoted to the advancement and education of theatre for young people and children, nationally and internationally.

However, the theatre of Drama and the theatre of Liturgy are very, very similar, with the same three participants, the Congregation, Actors, and Prompters. Danish theologian, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), developed the idea that **Christian worship is a drama**. What he observed was that in the drama of theatre, God would be the prompter, the liturgical leaders the actors, and the congregation the audience.

Kierkegaard taught that this understanding of the worship of drama is wrong when we look at the drama of worship. The people are taking on the wrong rolls. All of us, the **liturgical leaders** are the prompters in the worship. The congregation, *and the liturgical leaders also*, are the actors in the drama of worship, and God alone is the audience for the drama : the **Worship of Drama / the Drama of Worship**.

This is how I have linked my training in Theatre with our Liturgy today. We, the Vergers, are the Stage Managers of the Liturgy; we assist with the **Drama of Worship**. Behind the scenes, we, one of the prompters, let all the Actors perform their own individual dramas before their audience at **every** liturgy.

That is why we are here. We **are** a Ministry of **Welcome** and **Service**. Do you know our Latin motto: “*Servitas in Cultu et Cultus per Servitatem*” / that is “*Service in Worship and Worship through Service*”. We are here to assist the performance / the drama / the liturgy. Each of us serves our Clergy, and our Parish members together. Remember that **THE CHURCH IS** the people; not the building, not the clergy, not you or me; together, we all make up the great and glorious church triumphant.

Who would have thought? Who would have thought that today we would be back? Who knew what a **Verger** was twenty-five (25) years ago?

Who knew that twenty-five (25) years ago, we would be back; growing from thirty-two (32) to two-hundred-thirty-one (231) attending this annual conference; and from one-hundred-and-eight (108) members at the end of 1989, to one-thousand-four-hundred-and-one (1401) today, Oct 3.

We will have time in the next four days to, **meet, greet, treat, and welcome** and **thank** each other, during our gatherings here in Nashville; - at St George’s, - at Christ Church Cathedral, - at Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College, - at the Holiday Inn, Sheraton Hotel, and Scarritt-Bennett

Center; But I need to personally and publically thank a few people; without whom with their **support, belief, faith, love, hope, persuasion, assistance**, we would not be here, and where we, the **Guild**, are today.

First, I must remember those Founders that are now **verging** Processions through **St. Peter's Glorious Gates**:

Charles Agneau, Grace Cathedral, San Francisco CA
David Dorey, Westminster Abbey, London ENG
Mark Graham, All Saints', Atlanta GA
Chester Hanson, St Paul's, Oakland CA
Marc Hitchcock, Resurrection, Franklin TN
Howard Hodgson, St Peter's, Eggertsville NY
Karl Johnstone, All Saints', Phoenix AZ
Walter Mace, St Dunstan's, Houston TX
James McCarthy, Grace, Trumbull CT
Raleigh Rollason, Trinity Cathedral, Miami FL
William Stone, Christ Church Cathedral, Indianapolis IN
Victor Taber, St John's Cathedral, Providence RI

And I also want to name those Founders that I found but could not come, or those not found during the last year of lost and found searching :

Robert Baxter, St Andrew's, Grand Prairie TX
Wesley Dickmann, Guardian Angels', Lantana FL
Gordon Dirkes, St Albans', Auburndale FL
Duane Kuster, St Luke's, Long Beach CA
Lori Lamma, Grace Cathedral, San Francisco CA
Clive McClester, Southwark Cathedral, London ENG
Matthew McClellan, St John's Cathedral, Knoxville TN
Andrew Osborne, St John's Cathedral, Providence RI
David Pelletier, Cathedral St John the Divine, New York City NY
Paul Shoemaker, St John's Cathedral, Albuquerque NM
Douglas Swedberg, St Mark's Cathedral, Minneapolis MN
Corey Williams, St Paul's Cathedral, Burlington VT
John Williams, St Michael's & St George's, Clayton MO
Steven Zarko, Christ Church Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills MI

And now I want to welcome those Founders here tonight (twenty-five [25] years later) who have helped in so many ways throughout all these years:

First and foremost:

Helen Charuhas Gleason, my wife and better half, who believed, pushed, urged, supported, guided, planned, and has loved me for 30 years. You will see the fruits of her labors and **love** of this **Guild** on Saturday evening. Thank you, Helen. I love you!

David Richard Jette, Head Verger at Trinity Parish – Wall Street, New York City, New York, our second (2nd) President, and the closest of my verger compatriots and friends, and who has attended all but our conference in San Diego (#21). His support, love, belief, and strength has guided this **Guild** and me since day one. Thank you, David.

John George Campbell, Dean's Verger at Lincoln Cathedral, Lincoln, England, who without his mentoring and friendship, nothing would have happened. His leadership within the **Church of England Guild of Vergers**, and his support of this **Guild's** growth has been invaluable and appreciative. He has been my friend, colleague, and advisor, all this time. Thank you, John.

Kent David Wingerson, Cathedral Verger at Grace Cathedral, Topeka Kansas, who has been a constant friend of mine and this **Guild's** from day one. His trust and advice throughout all these years, even when he was working the nightshift at Blue Cross Blue Shield, as I used to work the nightshift at UPS, has kept our friendship close and personal. Thank you, Kent.

Andrew Jacob Morgret, Verger at St Elisabeth's, Bartlett TN, our 1st Secretary, and my constant Tennessee friend, supporter, and believer of this **Guild**. Thank you, Andy.

Robert John Koppe, former Verger at St. Bartholomew's, Atlanta Georgia in 1989, and is back for the first time. Welcome, and Thank you, Bob.

Thomas Edward Cameron, then Canons' Verger at St Paul's Cathedral, London, England, and now a Priest in the Church of England serving at the Parish of Clayton with Keymer, who since 1989 has been to America sixteen (16) times in the last twenty-five (25) years, missing Conferences only in Spokane (#7), New York (#9), Houston (#10), Overland Park (#13), Lexington (#15), Dallas (#16), Sewanee (#17), Boca Raton (#18), and Cleveland (#23). I welcome you once again, and thank you, Tom.

Now, I also must acknowledge and thank two others, who have brought us to where we are today:

Margaret Peters McLarty, Verger at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Jackson Mississippi, our 3rd President, and my friend. Margaret has been a true advocate for this **Guild** within the Episcopal Church \ USA's, House of Deputies, House of Bishops, and the office of our Presiding Bishop. She has promoted and guided our Ministry and Service among the highest levels of the Episcopal Church today. Thank you, Margaret.

and

Scott Austin Smith, Verger at Christ Church Cathedral, Nashville Tennessee; Our Host for this **Twenty-Fifth (25th) Anniversary Conference**, our Communications and Technology Officer, my best friend here in Nashville, and the person who has brought this **Vergers' Guild of the Episcopal Church** into the Twenty-First (21st)

Century. Thank you, Scott, for the last three years of work together, as we are all here now. You can stop worrying, my friend.

Thanks to each of you! I appreciate and love each of you, and your dedication and support to the growth of the *Verger's Guild of the Episcopal Church*.

And, I must thank St. George's Episcopal Church, especially, The Reverend Leigh Spruill, Rector; Nancy Reiser, Director of Music Ministries; and Don Greene, Verger; and the whole St. George's staff, for all their generosity, time, and efforts, to welcome and host us this evening. Thank you, St George's, for letting the *Verger's Guild* start our **25th Anniversary Conference** in the same place we had our **Inaugural Conference** in 1989. This is a special highpoint for me.

And to **everyone** here tonight, I am **delighted, honored, and gratified** to finally welcome you, **and this Guild's Annual Conference**, back to Nashville twenty-five (25) years later.

Finally, I want to close with a memory. In 1994, at our 6th *DECC* Conference in Indianapolis, I sat down at breakfast in the Ramada Inn with a new member and first time attendee from Iowa, introduced myself and welcomed her attendance and participation in the *Guild*. We talked, had breakfast, and at the end of breakfast, she asked if she could say something, and hoped I wouldn't be offended: "*Mr. Gleason, Thank you for introducing yourself. Thank you for sitting with me. You are not what I expected. I pictured a 'Distinguished, Elderly Gentleman with graying hair and a cane.'*", and you are not" - Well, today, nineteen (19) years later I do have the **graying/whiteish** hair; I still am a **Gentleman**, I hope; I am over sixty (60), so if that makes me **elderly**, *so be it*; I do not have **cane**, yet; and hopefully, I have **distinguished** myself in this august body since then.

Welcome, and **Thank you very much!!!**