

The remainder of the interviews in this book were done
by a class in oral history taught by Jeff Fiddler.

Rev. Canon Martin

Oral History Project

I, Samuel W. Haskin, hereby direct that the interview recorded December, 1975, at Chicago & Michigan
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ORAL HISTORY
343Q

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C O N T E N T S

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"He has been at once a strict disciplinarian and a tender sympathetic friend. He has been loyal to tradition; and yet daringly imaginative. He has been both realist and idealist, the practical man with his feet on the ground, and the man of vision with dreams to be fulfilled. And he has commanded the following of as fine a group of men and women as we have in this whole diocese." Those were the words used to describe Reverend Samuel Martin, by the Right Reverend Craig Stewart, at the tenth anniversary of the Saint Edmund's Church in 1938.

The Reverend Samuel Martin was born in Huntsville, Alabama, June 5, 1905, the son of Reverend and Mrs. John Thomas Martin. His father was a Baptist minister who has pastored in Alabama its vicinity for more than 30 years. His mother, Dorrence Martin, a -highly cultured woman, followed the teaching profession and served as supervisor of education for several counties in the state. She was anxious that one of her children should follow in the footsteps of their illustrious father and she instilled within them those Christian qualities which are so nobly exemplified in Father Martin. She died when he was 14 years of age.

Father Martin received his elementary training the south and being a youth with a high range of ability ambition went in search of knowledge attending numerous institutions of learning. He received a certificate for excellence in Hebrew language at the Episcopal Seminary, Virginia.

In June 1928, Bishop Anderson got Father Martin to come to the then dying white mission as deacon to try to develop a Negro congregation. He started with the building and a Negro congregation of nothing. By 1948 the Church had over one thousand members. It became a parish in 1940.

Father Martin served as a Deacon in St. Edmund's before returning to the Seminary to complete his training for the priesthood. He was ordained to the Sacred Order of Priests on the Second, Sunday after Trinity in the Church of the Epiphany. He then returned to St. Edmund's where he had served as a Deacon under Father Frank R. Myers who was the priest in charge of the former congregation assisted him in this efforts to organize a mission for black people. Father Martin immediately began canvassing friends and passing out pledge cards with the view of forming a Mission. He was successful in his efforts because St. Edmund's became a reality, ranking as one of the most successful parishes in the Diocese.

St. Edmund's Church has had a unique and interesting history. In 1905, its first services were held in a basement room and was known as the Washington Park Mission." In 1906, the name was changed to St. Edmund's Mission. Its growth from that time on was rapid and on Easter Day in 1908 the first services were held.

In the summer of 1928 when Bishop Anderson talked with Father Martin concerning his future work in the ministry he said, "I can only offer to you a building, there is no congregation. It will be up to you to secure your congregation. I am tremendously interested in this new mission among black people; I count upon you."

Having received this charge, the new deacon was filled with inspiration and determination not to disappoint his diocesan and also to build up a strong and important work among his own people. That he did which , is evident from the questionnaire which follows.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE REVEREND CANON MARTIN

Question 1: Can you tell me about your family's background?
a) Were you the first one to pursue such a career?

Answer: I am the son of the Reverend John Thomas Martin, a Baptist minister and Mrs. Dorrence Martin who was a supervisor for the Julius Rosenwald Fund in Anniston, Alabama. I lived with an aunt and uncle Mr. & Mrs. Samuel Raymond in Mobile, Alabama, where I attended grade and high school. My uncle and aunt moved to Gary, Indiana when I was a boy out of high school. I went to Boston, Mass., where I attended Boston University and Tufts College. I left college to enter the Episcopal Seminary in Petersburg, Va. Finished my theological work there, came to Chicago and was ordained a Deacon, later a Priest. Became Priest in charge of St. Edmund's Church in 1928.

b) Why were you raised away from home?

Answer: My mother had four sons. It was difficult financially to rear four boys and give them every advantage. My aunt having no children offered to take two of the boy's to give assistance to her sister.

Question 2: Where were you educated? a.) Was it a black school? b) Who paid for your education?

Answers: I worked my way through college and received some aid from the Diocese of Chicago for Seminary training
a) College was riot-Black. Seminary at that time was for Black students.
b) The Episcopal Diocese of Chicago gave aid for seminary.

Question 3: Did you first have a desire at that time to become a Reverend?

Answer: Yes, I have always desired to be a Minister (Priest). I have never been interested in churches that were over emotional. The Episcopal Church is in the Catholic Tradition and it met my needs. You might say the Church is reformed Catholicism.

Question 4: What prompted you to become an Episcopalian Reverend?
a) Were you raised an Episcopalian?

Answer: My aunt was a Roman Catholic Nun. I attended a Roman Catholic school but did not believe in the celebacy of the clergy. So I became interested in the Episcopal Church.

Question 5: The title "Canon" was granted to you recently from your former title "Reverand". Can you tell me what brought this-change?

Answer:

The proper title is "The Reverend Canon" A Canon is an honorary title conferred by the Bishop for outstanding achievement to the Diocese. It gives the holder a special seat in the Cathedral.

Question 6: Where/when (at what age) did you start in the ministry?

Answer: I began my ministry in Chicago in June 1928, at the age of 23.

Question 7: Tell me about the church founded in Chicago:
a) Where is the church located?

Answers

St. Edmunds Church was located at 5831 Indiana Ave., Chicago It was a White Parish. The neighborhood changed when Blacks moved in and the church soon became a Black Parish. After some years a new one; the Greek Church at 6105 Michigan Ave. was purchased, and the congregation grew to be the largest church among Episcopalians in Chicago., over two thousands members.

b) Were you the only founder or were you a co-founder?

You might say I was the founder of the church so far as Blacks taking it over. St. Edmund's Church was not a new congregation. It was a change in ethnic background. Whites having moved due to the influx of Blacks. The National Church turned property over to Blacks and whatever Whites. remained in the locality.

c) Where did the church get it's name?

The church is named for an English King, Edmund King and martyr. When Blacks came in the name was retained, some thought a new name should be used. I insisted that there are white as well as black saints and there, was no reason to change the name because the majority of the people were blacks. The blacks took over in 1928.

d) Was the congregation formed by a separation from another small group/miss% in that area?

The congregation took over the property of the white Episcopal Church". It continued as the same church with its membership black.

e) How was the first Vestry formed?

The Vestry is elected by the congregation.

f) Who was in it? (Black/White)

Blacks were all in the Vestry. All of the members lived in the area. Very few Whites were left.

g.) What type of people? (Class/Occupation)

Middle class blacks, mostly professional, well educated.

h) Did they differ from the congregation?

No.

i) Was there a desperate need at that time for an Episcopalian Church?

Yes.

j) How many persons formed the first congregation?

About fifty

k) What ages comprised that group?

Mostly adults.

1) Was there a rapid/gradual increase over the years?

Tremendous. Many blacks became dissatisfied with the emotional churches and were seeking a church where the services were dignified. The Worship Devotional and the children were well instructed in religious education.

m) Were there both white and/or blacks in the congregation?

A few whites remained for awhile.

n) Was the financial contribution fixed or voluntary?

Priest salary fixed, other voluntary.

Question 8: Were there problems in finding a location for that church?

Answer: Church building existed.

Question 9: What were some problems that you/congregation faced in the first five years?

Answer: Meeting expenses, getting new members.

a) Were those problems solved easily? Who/what helped to solve them?

The growth of the church increased the revenue. The well organized membership and the interest of the congregation solved many of the problems.

Question 10: What are the problems that you see in the church today?

Answer: The church faces a decline in attendance. A challenge to accomodate the church to the standards of the world. Changes in the Liturgy; women priest; lack of reverence for the church and holy things.

Question 11: Do you have the authority still to make/suggest changes now?

Answer: No.

a) Can you tell me what changes you would make if you had the authority?

If I had the authority I would banish all rock music in church. No jazz masses, no coming down to the world but a lifting up of the world to the standards of the church. I would have strict discipline for children and adults.

Question 12: How do you rate this church with regards to the others-throughout the United States?

Answer: The Episcopal church has always been considered a class church. It does not touch the masses. It doesn't appeal to those who prefer emotional services.

a) What do you mean by: "It does not touch the masses"?

The church not touching the masses means that most Blacks are Baptist, Methodist or Pentecostal or some other religion. The Church has not made the evangelical and missionary appeal to attract large numbers of negroes. The Roman Church has done much better.

Question 13: Looking back over the years, what changes would you make if you had to start all over again?

Answer: I don't know of many changes I would make.

Question 14: Was your retirement optional/mandatory?

Answer: Optional.

Question 15: Was there a decline in the attendance when you retired? Many times church members become so attached to one Pastor that when he leaves, they also follow? Was that true in your case? If yes what effect does that decline have on the church today?

Answer: There was no decline in membership when I retired.

Question 16: Do you still participate in church services?

Answer: **I am assistant at Mr. Trinity Parish in Three Rivers, Michigan. It is a white congregation with about six black families.**