

## Opening Hearts to God and Doors to the Community

### Holy Trinity From 1945-1963

I am honored to be here today.

Holy Trinity and its members have supported the Tisdales since 1945. Holy Trinity has been the rock on which our faith was nurtured. Holy Trinity has been the place where our faith has been tested and survived many challenges.

We have laughed, we have celebrated and we have cried at this church. Most importantly, we have celebrated the power of God and this church to help us. My father's crippling arthritis required him to resign as Rector of Holy Trinity in 1963, however the Tisdale family remains a part of this church today.

The Bible teaches us through stories and history. I will use stories and history to explain how my father and the Holy Trinity congregation of the 50's opened hearts to God and doors to the community. I believe that work is relevant to your life and to Holy Trinity's ministry today.

In 1945 Harry, Virginia and Kitty came to Holy Trinity. Harry Tisdale was 30. He had rushed through college in 3 years and seminary in 2 years. His mother was Roman Catholic, his aunt took him to the Episcopal Church in New Orleans. He loved it and became an acolyte. Holy Trinity was his first church of any size. I was born in 1947, Scott in 1957.

When my father graduated from high school, in 1933, America was in the Great Depression. There was no money for college. My father's mother and African Americans taught my father music and he played in bands and on the radio to make some money.

In 1935, he got a band scholarship to LSU. He met the Episcopal Chaplain, Joseph Ditchburn.

Joseph Ditchburn was from Bala Canada. He was an Episcopal minister who had a remarkable ability to lead young people. Father Ditchburn started the first Episcopal youth camps in Louisiana in the 1920's.

In 1930 he became Chaplain at LSU. He persuaded the Bishop of Louisiana to issue junior lay reader licenses. With Father Ditchburn's guidance, college students filled vacant missions around Baton Rouge. His program won national recognition.

In 1935, my father, age 20, conducted church services and preached sermons. While my father was at LSU, 8 men became lay readers, all went into the ministry. One became Bishop of Louisiana.

On Sundays, the 8 college students drove to churches in Father Ditchburn's Model A Ford, the Gospel Wagon. One student would drop off student "pastors" at these churches, sometimes driving 150 miles on Sunday.

Father Ditchburn taught my father how to create the church that Holy Trinity became.

Historians say that the 1950's American churches were quiet. America was returning to normalcy after World War II. People raised families and went to Sunday church services.

However, the congregation that greeted Harry Tisdale in 1945 was filled with progressive thinkers who wanted the church to be more than a place to go on Sunday morning. That is why Holy Trinity called Harry Tisdale.

My father's experience gave him a vision of what the church needed to do.

1. Find members and curates to be Church leaders
2. Create a Church Community
3. Develop a strong Youth Program
4. Build a bigger church and purchase houses to use for Sunday School and picnics.
5. Start Episcopal Missions and support other denominations
6. Take the lead on social issues
  - A. Integration
  - B. Servant Leadership
  - C. Women's Rights

How did Harry Tisdale, his assistants and the congregation implement this vision?

(1) Finding Holy Trinity's Leaders

(A) Leaders at Emory and Agnes Scott

Frank Allan, came to Holy Trinity in 1953 as an 18-year-old Emory student. My father visited him the next day. Frank agreed to teach third grade Sunday School class and later the youth program. He entered the ministry from Holy Trinity and later, became Bishop of this Diocese.

Leslie Gaylord, math professor at Agnes Scott who oversaw the building of this church – The Gaylord room is located next to the Chapel

Jerry Zeller, my father's second curate, he helped convince Frank Allen and Charlie Roper to become Episcopal ministers and led the youth program. Later he was Dean of Students at Emory.

John Stephens, Deacon of the Church, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Emory

(B) Leaders in the Decatur Community

Pierre Howard, lawyer and legislator who changed the Georgia law to provide for peaceful integration of public schools.

John Hightower, Southern Bell executive who was Senior Warden, Treasurer and a member of the Rector's Reckless Band.

Foley Treadway, founder of a prominent engineering firm and member of the band.

Nelson Severinghouse, owner of a quarry behind Stone Mountain. Senior Warden for several terms – Head of the Georgia Geological Society.

Harold Sargent, legendary golf professional at East Lake. Created the best junior golf program in the U.S.

(C) Women who would greet visitors and be mothers to the congregation. In 1953 my father wrote a letter to Roberta Lowndes, Virginia Estes and several male ushers. He was going on vacation. He told the ushers to pick up the newcomer cards and give them to the women who greet visitors so that Holy Trinity would not lose a visitor to another church. My father knew that women can connect better than men.

Roberta Lowndes

Joan Benson – still a greeter

Caroline Howard

Charlotte Hightower

Virginia Estes

Genie Treadway

Elizabeth McMullan

Ceil Cook, my father's secretary

(D) Youth leaders

Estelle Hind, on Vestry today

Frank Allan

Jerry Zeller

(E) Young Lay Readers for Sunday evening service.

Tom Lowndes

Walter Daves

Austin Ford

Charlie Taylor, Jr.

(F) Clergy were delegated significant responsibility

Jerry Zeller

Charlie Roper

- active in liturgical reform
- Holy communion held more frequently than once a month
- Eucharistic vestments for clergy, tapestry for Altar
- first Rector at Holy Cross, a mission started by Holy Trinity in 1954

Austin Ford

- first Rector at St. Bartholomew's mission started by Holy Trinity in 1954
- founded Emmaus House in 1967 to serve the poor and advocate for civil rights

### Creating a Church Community

My father used his experience with Father Ditchburn, with his LSU friends and his love of music, dancing, parties and baseball to create a strong community.

My father liked people. Whenever someone moved to Decatur, he visited them. Whenever a newcomer came to Holy Trinity, he visited them. He used his strengths and experience to implement his vision. He also used his weaknesses to create a church community. People saw courage, humor and honesty that was inspiring because the arthritis was crippling his entire body. The young vibrant minister they met in the 1940's could no longer play baseball, music or dance. His spirit in the face of the crippling disease was a clear reminder that we are all imperfect and yet forgiven by God for our imperfections.

### Women's Auxiliary and Men's Groups

Women and men were engaged in church activities beyond the Sunday worship service. Two men's groups were started. The Women's Auxiliary grew in importance when a new Altar was built and adorned with new tapestries.

### Parties, Picnics and Dances

The Parrish Hall was used throughout the week for birthday parties, dances, Bazaars and Wednesday night suppers. The Rector's Reckless band played at some church events.



## High and Low Church

In the 50's a serious issue for the church was whether the church should be a "high church," like the Roman Catholic Church, or a low church, less formal. Harry Tisdale said Holy Trinity was not a high church or low church just Good Church.

Everyone participated in the service. If the congregation did not sing a hymn well, he would make them do it over.

## Youth Program

Harry Tisdale learned the value of a strong youth program as an Acolyte in high school and as a lay leader in college. He recruited the best teachers he could find for the Youth Program.

Many boys were Acolytes but no girls. So, Martha Hightower and Kitty Tisdale became Acolytes, maybe the first in the diocese. John Hightower, was an acolyte. He recalls my father telling him to pick up any wafers that fell and eat them. After all, the wafers had been blessed.

Good Church meant you had to deal with your mistakes even if it looked funny to the congregation.

Like Father Ditchburn, Harry Tisdale taught young men at the Church to be lay leaders.

Seven young men from Holy Trinity entered the ministry:

Austin Ford

Jerry Zeller

Charlie Roper

Frank Allan

Charlie Taylor, Jr.

Bob Bailey

Herb Smith

One woman baptized at Holy Trinity also entered the ministry. Coile Estes was ordained as a Presbyterian Minister in 1983 just after Harry Tisdale died. My father would not have cared that Coile was a Presbyterian. He would have been so proud of her as an ordained woman priest.

#### Baseball in Decatur

One Sunday my father was playing baseball with the young lay readers before the evening service. A baseball broke a church window. Several men went out to stop the game. They found that Harry Tisdale hit the ball that broke the window. The baseball game would not be stopped.

My father played catch with me and John Hightower when we were young. He had to throw side arm – he could not raise his arm above his head. By 1957, he

was on crutches and could not catch or throw. The congregation stepped in to help. Charlie Taylor, Jr. taught me how to throw a slider.

My generous mother let me paint a strike zone on the house and throw a rubber baseball against the house for hours.

In 1959, Harry Tisdale would stand on crutches behind the backstop at Glenlake Field and watch me pitch. No other pitcher knew how to throw a slider and it was hard to hit. I loved my father being there to see me.

#### Providing New Facilities For A Growing Church

In 1951 the church held 230 people. 1,292 people came at Easter. Four services and chairs in the aisles. Sunday school had to be held in Glenwood School. A larger church was built to seat six hundred people. In 1954 land was purchased for a modern educational building.

By 1963, Holy Trinity had grown to be the third largest church in the Diocese.

#### Holy Trinity Park

Before the present Sycamore Park there was Holy Trinity Park. Two houses on Sycamore Street were purchased in 1956. The large back yards were used for picnics and church playgrounds.

## Starting Missions and Supporting Other Denominations

When Holy Trinity grew too large in the 1950's, part of the solution was to start new missions. When another denomination asked for help, that was part of Holy Trinity's service to the community. All Harry Tisdale cared about was that someone believe in a God. No scientist could explain creation, only the Bible could.

### Missions

#### 1951 St. Michaels and All Angels, Stone Mountain

Harry Tisdale's friend, Dewey Gable, was the first Rector.

#### 1954 Holy Cross, South DeKalb County

Charlie Roper went from Holy Trinity to be Rector of Holy Cross.

#### 1954 St. Bartholomews, Atlanta

Austin Ford went from Holy Trinity to be the first Rector.

Some people were afraid that the new missions would reduce Holy Trinity's membership. They were wrong. As the Bible teaches, those that give generously will receive. Holy Trinity continued to grow.

### Supporting Other Denominations

In 1946, the Evangelical Lutheran Church wanted to build a new church on the corner of Clairmont Road and Erie Avenue. The land was zoned residential, rezoning was necessary. Many residents in the area were opposed to having a

church in their neighborhood. Experts in real estate testified that the church would lower the value of homes in the neighborhood. Pierre Howard represented the Lutheran Church. Harry Tisdale was not an expert in real property. However, Pierre qualified Harry Tisdale as an expert in church property. Harry Tisdale testified that the church would not lower the value of the neighborhood homes. The Zoning Board rezoned the property. The Lutheran Church is still there and the area is thriving.

### Leadership on Social Issues

Holy Trinity took the lead on social issues facing Decatur and the United States in the 1950's.

### Integration

Georgia's response to Brown v. Board of Education was separate but equal schools and laws prohibiting integration. Harry Tisdale preached that all people were equal in God's eyes regardless of race, gender or social status. He was color blind, literally and spiritually. He drove an orange and white Buick, but not very well. People knew to stay away from the orange Buick.

Harry Tisdale told the congregation that the Georgia laws had to be changed and the schools kept open. Harry Tisdale led from the left. Pierre Howard and others in the congregation led from the center. The laws were changed. Holy

Trinity inspired Austin Ford to start Emmaus house to serve the poor and advocate for civil rights.

### Servant Leadership

Frank Allan, Austin Ford, Harry Tisdale and Pierre Howard were servant leaders like Father Ditchburn and like Jesus.

In 2004, I attended a Sunday School class in servant leadership taught by Martha Eskew. I fell in love with Martha immediately and married her in 2006. She still teaches me. I am not the best student, but I am still learning. Growing up in Decatur, I knew about Martha's father Bob Eskew. He was a leader in the Blue Ridge Conference on Leadership which taught Servant Leadership to corporations.

Servant leadership draws on the strengths of all the people in the congregation or in the organization. Corporations like Google teach servant leadership. My son Jack works for Google.

This congregation has servant leaders - Greg, Jenna and others.

### Women's Rights

Leslie Gaylord and others would talk with my father about the discrimination women faced. In 1969, my father was head of the committee that selects new priests for the Diocese. My father and the Bishop came up with a plan to have a very qualified woman ordained. It did not work, but it set the stage for the ordination of women in the 1970's.

My father's mother and African Americans taught him music that enabled him to go to college. He knew how women collaborate and connect better than men. It was obvious that women were needed as priests.

### Death

My father died in 1983. The Holy Trinity congregation came to our house, bringing food and telling stories. The congregation ministered to the Tisdales in a time of sorrow – making his death a celebration of his life. I have been diminished by the death of my father, mother and brother. However, I know that the resurrection of Jesus is about absence. The tomb was empty. Jesus was with God in heaven.

I believe that my father is with God, free from the horrible pain in his joints that forced him to give up Holy Trinity in 1963.

My father faced death with courage and humor.

Charlie Roper asked my father if he really believed in resurrection of the body. My father said: “Hell no, not this body.”

### What Made Harry Tisdale and Holy Trinity so Successful?

1. All people are equal before God regardless of race, gender, or social status. What counts is character. Women and African Americans taught my father music and introduced him to the Episcopal Church. It was natural for him to treat everyone the same way.

2. Use your talents and enjoy life. He did not have money for college, so he got a band scholarship. Dancing, singing and parties were part of life. Why not use the church for those activities.

3. Find a mentor – Joseph Ditchburn – Learn to be a Servant Leader. Harry Tisdale mentored Jerry Zeller – Jerry mentored Frank Allen and Charlie Roper.

4. The youth program needs to be the life blood of a good church.

5. Find what you are good at, what you like to do and where there is a need. If you find this, you will enjoy life. He tried to find each member of the congregation's talents and invited them to participate.

6. Treat everyone as a friend – He taught me that even a lawyer on the other side of a case could be my friend.

7. Clergy are not special. Everyone is imperfect. He poked fun at clergy pretense and formality.

8. Life is fragile – find time to enjoy part of every day.

9. Test your faith – It is okay to debate the existence of God and the role of the church. Churches are losing members. We need to learn what worked in the past and evaluate what is needed in the future.

10. Believe in the spirit of God and service to the community.



11. Be flexible. Take risks. Speak out. Learn when to lead, when to listen and when to follow.

12. Persist even in the face of death.

I often found my father half sleeping in a chair when I woke up. It hurt too much to lie down. He never complained. Complaining would not do any good.

One day a woman came into his office and said she could heal him. He called Charlie Roper to come to his office immediately. Charlie found him running around his desk to avoid the woman putting her hands on his head. Real doctors could only give him aspirin. He knew he would not recover from the crippling disease. But he never gave up.

## Tisdale Hall

In 2002, this congregation named the Parrish Hall Tisdale Hall. Harry Tisdale left Holy Trinity in 1963 and died in 1983. Why did the congregation even remember him in 2002? The answer is clear. Harry Tisdale's greatest legacy was to create a Church whose members were prepared to continue Holy Trinity's vision and mission regardless of how good his successor was. Today you continue to implement that mission and vision.

The Tisdales officially left Holy Trinity in 1963. However, we never really left. My father, my mother and my brother's ashes are in the garden. But the Tisdale spirit will always be present in this church.

AMEN