INTERVIEW WITH
ELLEN MARTIN
ON JULY 27, 2018

This interview of Ellen Martin was recorded on July 27, 2018, by parishioner Karen Lamb in connection with the Bicentennial Celebration of Christ Church Georgetown. It was then edited and approved by Ellen Martin on September 14, 2018

Were you a cradle Episcopalian and if not, how did you come to the Church?

I grew up a Presbyterian, in Nashville. When my husband Swift, who was an Army officer, was stationed in Alaska, we attended a small Episcopal mission church. The women would bring bread for communion, and the men provided the wine. They went hunting at the end of the service. Everyone had a job: I taught Sunday school and Swift was on the Vestry. It felt to me what an early Christian church might have been like.

As I was a Presbyterian, the rector wouldn’t give me a Communion until I attended confirmation classes. As a result, I became an Episcopalian. When I first joined the Altar Guild, my husband Swift looked at me like, “As a Presbyterian, should you be doing this?” Since joining it, I have always loved the Episcopal Church, the music, and the liturgy, which we didn’t have in the Presbyterian Church.

When did you begin attending Christ Church and why?

Swift was stationed in Frankfurt, Germany, for three years, and in 1977 we returned to Washington, DC, because he had family here. His mother, Marguerite Prewer Martin, whose father was an Anglican minister in Canada, was an active member of Christ Church and our sons, who stayed with their grandparents in Washington when we were in Europe, went to St. Albans, and were acolytes at Christ Church. So, it was a natural fit.

What clergy and assistants to you remember in particular?

I have known three rectors now – Sanford Garner, Stuart Kenworthy and Timothy Cole. I’ve been very happy with all three! Each had different, and special gifts. When you lose one rector, you think, “I’ll never replace him, and I’ll never find anybody I feel so comfortable with again,” but I did.

I was very fond of Sanford Garner, who I grew up with in Nashville. Actually, I had a crush on him when I was a little girl! He almost married my first cousin. Sanford was very special to me, and I was delighted to be in Christ Church with him. A wonderful preacher and caregiver, he also had a great sense of humor. One time, doing Altar Guild duty, I had left a purificator off a chalice. I was so concerned about it that I told him right before he went out to conduct the service. He looked at me very sternly, and then he laughed of course!
That experience calls to mind Stuart Kenworthy, who I also loved. When he first came to Christ Church, I caught him peeking underneath the veil to make sure we had put the host on. Gradually, he became more comfortable with us. Stuart was a great giver of pastoral care, visiting both Swift and me many times at home and in the hospital during our various illnesses. I’ve gotten to know Timothy Cole and love him – and his pastoral care -- as well. I think he’s on the right path. I feel we’re very fortunate with our clergy.

I especially remember dear Father Ron Connor and his sermons and lectures. Our rectors have always brought in wonderful assistants, including Bill Hague, Lupton Abshire, and Lyndon Shakespeare. Rita Steadman was an outstanding priest, and my whole family was very fond of her. Her sermons were wonderful, as was her pastoral care. She visited my homebound mother-in-law many times.

Glen Metzdorf has also been ever present, always knowing if something was amiss. The Altar Guild could ask him any question and he would know the answer. And no one will ever forget the wonderful food he used to prepare for Coffee Hour. He will be pretty irreplaceable.

**What parishioners do you remember fondly?**

There have been so many people I knew in the church who have touched me. Some have died, and some are still here. One was the legendary Eloise Page, a great friend of my mother-in-law. She was head of the Altar Guild, so I worked with Eloise a lot. She was very particular about who joined the Altar Guild, perhaps a little too much so. Yet Eloise was a great teacher who was at the church day and night and even when she was posted to Greece, she kept up with us.

She also cared greatly for our members and their families. When my daughter Liza married, our house was in an uproar because we were repairing it. Eloise put up Liza and my son-in-law in her house for a while and let them display their wedding gifts. When she started turning down their bed, that got to be too much!

A lot of the other people I knew were members of the Altar Guild. They were wonderful women. One was Peebles Ogletree, who was a real character. A very small woman, she would always sit up front in the church and wore a red hat with a big feather that stuck up. She was a devout Christian, and once said to me, “All I need is a cot, a pot, and a picture of Jesus!” Very close to Sanford Garner, she kept a picture of him in his robes in her house. Glen Metzdorf, who used to bring her to church, was a close friend.

I also remember many other Altar Guild members, especially Joan Kent Stansbury, Kathy Graff, Dorothea Capello, and Florence Pilkington. Florence and her husband Richard were both very involved with the church. One day, when Florence was ironing the fair linen in the sanctuary, Sanford came in and asked what she was doing. She said, “It’s all right -- I talked to God and He told me it was all right!” I think about all these wonderful people and miss them.

**In addition to serving on and chairing the Altar Guild, what activities have you participate in?**
I was a member of the Friendly Visitors’ Program, which served a real purpose, but has now been disbanded. The 10 – 12 members would bring the Sunday service leaflet and flowers from church to someone who was homebound, and visit with him or her. The group also worked to find transportation for people who found it difficult to get to church. This activity, which at one time included a shuttle, also has been discontinued.

**How involved was your husband, Swift, with Christ Church?**

A West Pointer, Swift served in the military for 20 years, and served in Vietnam twice. He was a great organizer and very active in every church we attended. When we returned from Europe and settled in Washington, Swift became very active at Christ Church. His grandfather, Canon Prewer, was an Anglican clergyman in Canada and worked with the Indians for 30 years building schools and hospitals. Swift grew up knowing his grandfather and I think that had a lot to do with his activism, particularly for his concern and care for the homeless.

In fact, Swift helped set up the homeless shelter years ago, along with Philip Wagner. Swift and I participated together. He and Phil would always set up the beds, and I would bring food and we would spend the night. Eventually, it became too hard to do, but the shelter is still flourishing.

Swift helped start a lay reader program that included women, because women were lay leaders in our churches in Europe. He served as Senior Warden when Stuart arrived, and the two were very close. Swift also was a lay reader, a chalice bearer, and a member of the Finance Committee. He would usually sit at the back of the church to make sure (in a loving fashion) that any of the homeless people who attended did not disrupt the worship service. Along with Don Shannon, Swift was also often found in the kitchen after church services cleaning up after the coffee hour.

I remember that President and Mrs. Bill Clinton came to the church one snowy Sunday, and someone alerted Swift that they were coming, with their Secret Service men. Swift and Don Shannon quickly shoveled out the garden. When Swift’s mother arrived, she did not have proper identification to enter, but someone quickly said, “It’s all right -- she’s Swift’s mother!” Swift escorted Mrs. Clinton down the aisle.

Swift loved to sing, and Stuart used to say that he could hear him sing all the way from the back of the church. Swift’s funeral had lovely music, which he would have greatly appreciated.

**How has Christ Church changed over the years?**

Stuart Kenworthy, I think, built the church up to include more young people. Once, when I attended a Christmas Eve service years ago with my young children, I got strange looks that seemed to imply, “Why would you bring your children to church at this late hour?” My
grandchildren often attend church when visiting. There is now a choir for children, and my
grandniece, Helene, sings in it.

There is also much more outreach, and I have noticed that there are a lot more young couples
involved in this. Unfortunately, there seems to be less outreach now for older people.

In addition to more young couples and children, there are more church services. I remember
that only one member of the Altar Guild might do a whole month of services on her own.
Speaking of the Altar Guild, it is much larger and socializes together much more than getting
together for an occasional luncheon. This is a very dedicated group of congenial women who
are actively involved in the church, contributing countless hours of their time. Because of health
problems, I can’t be as active as I was, but Guild members go out of their way to make me still
feel a part of the Guild.

Coffee hour used to be largely put on by the Altar Guild and the Flower Committee, but now
other groups are involved. The Sunday School and the Adult Forum have always been excellent,
and continue to be.

The music, of course, is predictably wonderful. I do wish that the church would tape the
Christmas Lessons and Carol Service, as it did previously.

What changes, if any, would you like to see and what would you especially like to see
preserved?

We should continue outreach – situations change, and we must change. The emphasis on
children is great, but I think we could do more with the homebound older parishioners. From
personal experience, I know how important that is.

So many people I knew well have either left, or died. I don’t think meeting new people is a
problem, though, and it’s easy to speak to people. There are so many services that it expands
the pool of possibilities

Over the years, do you remember how the church handled important events?

On Memorial Day the persons who were in World War II dressed in uniform used to come to
church to participate in a special commemorative service. Patriotic songs were sung.

When the new prayer book appeared, some people were concerned, and one woman asked,
“Are they going to burn the old prayer book?” Sanford gradually introduced the new prayer
book. There was never much dissension in the church, although positions taken by the
National Cathedral were discussed. Some people disagreed with some of the things, and were
more conservative, but no one ever contemplated leaving the church or anything like that. I
think we all felt the church was its own entity. We felt close. The church kept together, I think.
**What are some of your most special memories of Christ Church?**

The memory of Christ Church dearest to my heart is the dedication of the Christmas crèche on December 17, 2017, in memory of Swift. The crèche figures were hand carved and painted in the Bavarian village of Oberammergau, home of the world-famous passion play. My grandparents and mother visited Oberammergau in 1927, and Swift and I were there in 1990, so the crèche has a special meaning for me. As The Rev’d Timothy Cole wrote to me: “The crèche will enrich the life of Christ Church, and particularly of its children for, I hope, many decades to come.” This is my hope and prayer.

The wedding of Mimi Martin, my sister-in-law, to Rob Hanke in December 1960, with Dr. Anschutz presiding, was especially memorable. The wedding of another sister-in-law, Ann Martin, to Donald Calder in November, 1967, was special. My children – ages 6, 7, and 3 – were in the wedding, along with their two first cousins. I remember one child lost a shoe, which went flying! The boys wore short pants with blue satin sashes. My daughter, Liza, wore a beautiful handmade dress. I also fondly remember the baptism of my granddaughter, Ingrid Martin (my son John’s daughter) in June, 2000. Stuart Kenworthy officiated.

Liza’s wedding to Nathaniel Chapman, in 1978, was particularly special to us. Sanford Garner officiated, and it was a beautiful candlelight night service, with the bride and bridesmaids all dressed in white. At Communion, someone said they all looked like angels! Another person said that the scene was reminiscent of Proust.

**In the end, can you sum up your feelings about Christ Church in a nutshell?**

I just feel very fortunate and very thankful to have a church like Christ Church. I feel very comfortable there and very uplifted, enriched and helped. I have come to appreciate this even more because of the pastoral visits during my recent health problems. The church means a lot to me and will continue to, I am sure. It’s really a home to me.