

# Nine Bishops of Western New York

by Laurie Wozniak © 1997

## **William Heathcote DeLancey**

Western New York's first bishop, the Rt. Rev. William Heathcote DeLancey, was elected on May 9, 1839. DeLancey was a strong leader and a man of vision, characteristics that served the young diocese well.

At the time, the fledgling Diocese was funded primarily by New York City. At his first Diocesan Convention, DeLancey addressed the issue of financial independence. He also made it clear that he intended to be the chief missionary of the Diocese. He had his work cut out for him, for at that time, the Diocese of Western New York stretched from Syracuse to Buffalo. In his first year alone, DeLancey covered 4100 miles. From his residence in centrally located Geneva, he visited 75 parishes and held services in twenty additional areas where churches had not yet been organized. One hallmark of DeLancey's term was the establishment of the Christmas Fund for Disabled Clergymen, the forerunner of the Church Pension Fund.

Though the Church was embroiled in debate centered around the Tractarians during the 1840s, Western New York, under DeLancey's calm yet firm guidance, was not. In fact, it became known as the Model Diocese, and by 1849 had grown from 96 parishes/74 resident clergy to 127 parishes /113 resident clergy.

DeLancey also helped the young Diocese develop a social conscience. In Rochester a city missionary worked with immigrants. A "free" waterfront chapel was founded to serve the needs of the seamen whose boats put in at Buffalo's bustling harbor. Clergy were encouraged to hold services in county jails and the Auburn Prison where DeLancey confirmed 11 prisoners in 1854. And in 1858, five women from St. Paul's Church, Buffalo, founded what is today known as the Episcopal Church Home.

By 1864, the demands of the episcopacy were becoming too much for the aging DeLancey. He asked Diocesan Convention for an assistant. The Rev. Arthur Cleveland Coxe was elected Bishop Coadjutor and consecrated on January 4, 1865. Bishop DeLancey died just three months later on April 5.

## **Arthur Cleveland Coxe**

The Rt. Rev. Arthur Cleveland Coxe was quite different from his predecessor. He possessed a distinctly anti-Roman bias and disagreed mightily with the Ritualists. He did, however, support some of their principles, notably the See Principle and the Cathedral Idea. This became immediately evident at Diocesan Convention in August of 1865.

Coxe's first request was to move to Buffalo, echoing his belief in the See Principle. Of the booming young city he said "every city so large and so well situated should an Episcopal See." Next, Coxe proposed a division of the Diocese. (Just three years later, in 1868, the Diocese of Central New York was established with Syracuse as its See city.)

In April 1866, shortly after settling in Buffalo, Coxe accepted an offer from St. Paul's, Buffalo for the church to become the Cathedral Church of the Diocese. It was also during Coxe's term that St. Philip's, Buffalo was founded to "serve the needs of the city's Negro population."

In 1877 Coxe was informed that a recently ordained priest, the new curate at St. Andrew's, Buffalo, had placed candles on the altar there. The Bishop immediately directed the Rev. Charles Henry Brent to discontinue this "Romish" practice. The young priest was indignant. He resigned his position and left the Diocese.

Coxe was a prolific writer, he had been called upon many times to lend his hand to important Church works. The most notable is the American edition of The Ante-Nicene Fathers which he edited in 1885.

At the 1889 Convention, Coxe made it clear that he was no longer vigorous enough to handle the job of bishop alone, but finances prevented the election of an assistant bishop. Eventually, he was authorized to secure the aid of other bishops, and in 1893 Coxe prevailed upon his friend, Bishop William D. Walker of North Dakota to assist him during the final years of his term. Bishop Coxe died on July 20, 1896.

### **William David Walker**

On October 6, 1896, 89 priests, five deacons and 164 lay delegates met at Trinity, Buffalo, for a special convention to elect a new bishop. Before the election began, a resolution to once again divide the Diocese was introduced. Under canon law, however, the lack of a bishop precluded its consideration. The election then began and the Rt. Rev. William David Walker was selected on the sixth ballot.

After his enthronement on December 23, 1896, a member of the clergy remarked that dividing the Diocese had now become a possibility. The new bishop's reply followed without hesitation, "Not while I am the Bishop of Western New York!"

Walker didn't possess Coxe's intellect or gift for oratory. He was a man of frankness and simplicity, and he had the reputation for being a workhorse. At his first convention in May 1898 he reported a rigorous schedule of visitations, 1494 confirmations and the ordinations of three priests and seven deacons. He followed this with a heartfelt plea for missionary work in the Diocese.

Early on, Walker decided to reside in Rochester for several months each year. This did much to quiet the voices calling for Diocesan division. He also asked to meet with the vestry of each parish during his parish visitations. These practices helped Walker maintain a good overall perspective of the Diocese.

In the first seven years of his episcopacy, the Diocese realized tremendous growth. The number of parishes increased from 126 to 151; communicants increased from 19,000 to 23,000; eight new clergy brought the Diocesan total to 128; the missionary offering rose from \$6,132 to \$18,426; and Diocesan offerings rose by \$118,848. But growth was not the cause of WNY's notoriety in 1906.

In April and May 1906, the Rev. Dr. Algernon Sidney Crapsey, rector of St. Andrew's, Rochester, was tried by the Church on the charge of heresy. The cause was his 1905 book

entitled Religion and Politics in which he entertained many of the views espoused by Biblical critics. Though on the third day of the trial, Crapsey's lawyer read a statement that virtually retracted the ideas advanced in the book, the retraction was too little and too late. Crapsey was found guilty, and the original verdict was upheld upon appeal. In November of 1906 Bishop Walker deposed him.

In 1916, a request was made for the Committee on Constitution and Canons to frame a canon during the coming year to allow female parishioners to vote in parish elections. As a staunch conservative, Walker did not support this change. On May 2, 1917, before Convention arrived, Walker died. Two weeks later, the Committee on Constitution and Canons reported to Convention that it had declined to draft the canon, so a special committee was appointed to do so and the new canon was adopted.

### **Charles Henry Brent**

Five weeks after Walker's death, a special convention to elect took place. Eight names were presented. The first ballot narrowed the field to four, two High Churchmen and two Liberal Evangelists. On the third ballot one of the High Churchmen was elected, but he subsequently declined election. In July the convention tried again, but the candidate elected this time also declined the election.

In October, Convention convened for the third time. A new name was placed in nomination: the Rt. Rev. Charles Henry Brent. The same Brent who had indignantly left Buffalo back in 1877. He had since distinguished himself while working in Boston's slums and been elected first missionary Bishop of the Philippines in 1901 where he became known as a statesman and advocate of church unity.

Brent had already declined elections to two other stateside dioceses, but when Western New York called, he was ready to return home. World War I was raging and General Pershing (whom Brent had confirmed while in the Philippines) had received orders to take command of the US troops in France. Pershing wanted Brent to be his chaplain-general. In November 1917 Brent met with the Standing Committee. It was agreed that he would become the fourth Bishop of WNY and be granted an immediate leave allowing him to accept Pershing's call. For 18 months, the Standing Committee acted as ecclesiastical authority. Finally, in February 1919, Brent became resident within the Diocese, but his dedication to the goal of church unity would draw him away from the Diocese repeatedly throughout the remaining years of his episcopacy.

In 1920 Brent presided over a planning meeting for the first World Conference on Faith and Order and attended the Lambeth Conference. A sought after speaker, he also traveled to New York City, Boston, Toronto, St. Louis and Washington, DC for speaking engagements. His schedule took him away so frequently, that he requested a suffragan, and the Rev. David Lincoln Ferris of Rochester was elected in 1920. Diocesan Council was established that same year, and the Diocese's first financial secretary was also hired.

Even though Brent was often away and relegated much of the administrative work of the Diocese to Ferris, he did strive to be a spiritual leader to his clergy. In 1922 he stressed the value for children of "habitual attendance at regular church services with all members of the family." He directed clergy to make their sermons "comprehensible to children," feeling certain that adults would learn something from such sermons as well.

In 1924, his health failing, Brent requested the election of a coadjutor and Ferris was unanimously elected. The issue of Diocesan division was again raised, and a committee was appointed study the matter.

In 1927, the first World Conference on Faith and Order met in Lausaane, Switzerland. Brent's long dedication to the cause of church unity was richly rewarded when conference representatives from 127 Christian Churches elected him as their president. Two years later Brent returned to Lausaane for a continuation committee meeting. He died on March 27 and was buried there according to his request to be buried in the city where he died.

### **David Lincoln Ferris**

The transition to new leadership went smoothly as the Rt. Rev. David Lincoln Ferris assumed authority. The Convention of May 1929 immediately granted Ferris' request for a coadjutor, and passed the resolution calling for a division of the Diocese easily. In October a special convention to elect the coadjutor was held at St. Paul's Cathedral.

Since Ferris had worked from Diocesan offices in Rochester, it was naturally assumed that he would take the reins of the new Diocese of Rochester. Therefore, whoever was elected coadjutor would become bishop of the Buffalo end of the Diocese of WNY.

During the time Ferris served the Diocese of WNY, he distinguished himself as a true pastor to his flock. He made it a point to visit ill clergy, call upon families when prominent lay leaders died, and make regular visits to homes for the poor and aged.

### **Cameron Davis**

The Rev. Dr. Cameron Davis, rector of Trinity, Buffalo, was elected Bishop Coadjutor on October 29, 1929. He was consecrated on January 23, 1930, at Trinity, the church he had served for over 30 years.

When the Diocese of WNY officially split in May of 1931, the transition was a smooth one. In fact, the division of the Diocese was a relatively simple matter when compared to the problems spawned by the Great Depression. The brightest and best of the clergy kept or found positions. Less desirable ones found themselves unemployed. Davis took this opportunity to call for not fewer, but better clergy, and set up the diaconate as a year of field study before ordination to the priesthood. Though many parishes were disenfranchised during the early 30s due to nonpayment of Diocesan assessments, Calvary, Williamsville and St. Philip's, Buffalo gained in their ability to meet their own expenses. It wasn't until 1935 that things generally started to improve.

After World War II broke out in Europe, the Church of England appealed to the Episcopal Church for help with its missionary work. WNY donated more than \$4,500 to the nationwide campaign. Soon the US entered the war, and another drive was started to support Diocesan clergy serving as chaplains in the armed forces. The war eventually caused a shortage of clergy, and in 1944 Davis suggested that the laity be encouraged to participate more fully in the spiritual life of the church. He advocated the formation of a select group of lay people who could preach and conduct services in the mission field.

On December 13, 1945, Davis informed the Standing Committee that he had reached the mandatory retirement age of 72 and therefore had to resign. This new canon had been passed by 1943's General Convention, but no procedures were in place to deal with it. The Diocesan Convention of 1946 petitioned the House of Bishops to make Davis' retirement effective September 1, 1947, and plans were made to elect a coadjutor. The Convention, however, failed twice to elect a coadjutor before Davis retired.

### **Lauriston Livingston Scaife**

The Rt. Rev. Lauriston Livingston Scaife, a moderate High Churchman, was elected as the seventh Bishop of Western New York on January 20, 1948, after a compromise candidate elected in October refused the position. His consecration followed on May 13. Representatives from every Protestant Church in Buffalo attended the service.

Scaife "looked" like a bishop. Though he had the voice of an orator and a tall, imposing presence, he was a friendly man with a lively sense of humor. As bishop, Scaife was a frequent celebrant at the Cathedral. He was a devoted pastor to his clergy. Once, the daughter of a diocesan priest became seriously ill and required expensive medical treatment. When the priest went to pay the bill, the hospital informed him that the balance had been paid in full by Bishop Scaife.

Scaife had the good fortune of being bishop during the postwar boom. In 1950 Mrs. Marjorie M. McKinley presented the Diocese with the gift of a residence at 1114 Delaware Avenue. The property serves to this day as the home of the Diocesan offices. During this same period, an anonymous benefactor donated \$250,000 for the Episcopacy Endowment.

During the 1950s, Scaife became very active in the ecumenical affairs of both the local and National Church. In 1963, the strength of the Diocese of WNY and its leader was reflected in the attendance at the 125th Anniversary Celebration. In 1968, Scaife founded Episcopal Charities (now Episcopal Community Services), which originally funded six secular social service agencies.

Bishop Scaife retired on June 1, 1970, and died just three months later on September 19.

### **Harold Barrett Robinson**

In October 1967, the main business before Convention was the election of a Bishop coadjutor. Sixteen names were presented and the mood was one of rancor. The choice was finally narrowed to one high and one low candidate, but after numerous ballots the convention appeared deadlocked. Then a compromise candidate was nominated from the floor — the Very Rev. Harold Barrett Robinson, Dean of the Cathedral. Robinson had never aspired to be bishop, but bowed to pressure from the floor in order to resolve the deadlock.

Robinson's consecration on February 24, 1968, drew national attention because it took place in a Roman Catholic Cathedral. The Catholic diocese had graciously offered St. Joseph's so that more people could be accommodated at the service. Not to be out done, the Jewish community offered reception space at Temple Beth Zion. These two unprecedented circumstances, foretold of the unique period of social and economic change during which Robinson would shepherd the Diocese of WNY.

Upon Scaife's retirement in June of 1970, Robinson became WNY's eighth bishop.

The exodus from city to suburbs that had begun after WWII continued. City parishes, once the strongest in the Diocese, found themselves struggling. Young people began leaving the area to seek opportunities elsewhere. The Civil Rights Movement had gained momentum, but many in the Diocese felt things were just fine the way they were. They took issue with their Bishop and his support of minority rights. Robinson said simply that the Episcopal church would never be a partner of racism.

Prior to WWII, the role of women in the Church was extremely limited. They could not serve on vestries, be lay readers, or as girls, serve as acolytes. The ordination of a woman was unthinkable. During the 1970s and 80s, however, women made great gains in equal rights in society and the workplace. It was only natural for them to seek equal rights in the Church. Robinson at first opposed the ordination of women. But eventually he changed his mind. At the Cathedral on June 4, 1977, he ordained the Revs. Judith Burrows, Sarah Reith and Patricia Bird.

The ordination of homosexuals also became an issue, and it was one to which Robinson remained opposed throughout his episcopacy. New social mores changed the nature of American society, and Robinson decried the loss of authority and respect that government, schools, churches and social institutions suffered as a result.

Another event that rocked the bastions of the Church during this time was the 1979 revision of Prayer Book. Traditionalists felt the eloquence of the earlier version had been completely destroyed. By 1988, however, every church in the Diocese had adopted the new book.

During Robinson's term, there was an unprecedented level of ecumenical spirit throughout the religious community. Pulpit exchanges were common and churches banded together to address the social and economic problems that were affecting them all. Buffalo Area Metropolitan Ministries, Inc. (BAMM), a coalition of religious leaders that included Muslims, was founded to help alleviate critical needs among all people of Western New York. Venture in Mission, Compass House, the Cursillo movement, expansion of the Episcopal Church Home and the initiation of full-time chaplains at Roswell Park and Buffalo General Hospitals also brought Robinson much satisfaction.

Robinson retired in 1987 and was diagnosed with leukemia a few years later. He achieved remission in 1992, but it was short-lived. He died on May 5, 1994. A funeral was held at St. Paul's Cathedral, and his remains are interred in the columbarium he helped to plan while Dean of the Cathedral.

### **David Charles Bowman**

Elected coadjutor in May 1986, the Rt. Rev. David Charles Bowman was consecrated on September 14 of that year, and became WNY's ninth bishop upon Robinson's retirement. Though Bishop Bowman feels history will be the best judge of his episcopacy, he says he always tried, first and foremost, to be a pastor to his people.

For the Episcopal Church, the late 80s and 90s were fraught with internal division around questions of human sexuality. Bishop Bowman says his greatest challenge was "helping the Diocese to focus on its mission and ministry rather than on internal issues that divide us and

divert attention from the Church's real purpose." During this time, WNY faced a declining population and struggling economy. Yet for the most part, the Diocese held its own. The number of adult communicants remained stable, but two parishes were closed.

The 150th Anniversary Celebration held at Chautauqua in 1988 and *Belonging to God* in 1995 were two of the high points of Bowman's term. "At the Anniversary Service, I issued a challenge to the Diocese which resulted in the Special Convention of 1988, and ultimately in the Forward in Faith Campaign." Forward in Faith raised \$4 million, half of which stayed in local congregations and was used by many to make their buildings handicapped accessible. The other half was used by the Diocese to establish seminarian scholarships, help clergy in crisis and establish the Episcopal Campus Ministry at UB, among other things. The Campus Ministry was recognized nationally as one of the strongest programs reaching blacks and other minorities on campus.

When Forward in Faith ended, the Diocese turned to the discernment process in order to learn the direction in which the Holy Spirit desired the Diocese to proceed. The result of that process was the Word & Vision Declaration, the focus of which had impact upon the election of the next bishop.

Bishop Bowman worked to dispel racism and made it a policy to have minorities and women a part of every Diocesan decision making body. He was also an active member of the Buffalo Area Metropolitan Ministries and was honored by the group in December 1996 for his ecumenical work. He supported the Episcopal-Lutheran Concordat. Its initial defeat by the Lutherans was a major disappointment to him. He took much satisfaction when the agreement was finally approved, even though this took place after he had retired.

Bishop Bowman often said that the Church's greatest sin was parochialism. One of the primary goals of his episcopacy was to "give the Diocese a broader vision of what the Church is about and to make it feel a part of that greater whole." The growth of Episcopal Community Services and Horns of Plenty during his episcopacy, and the decision to join in the Episcopal Life Wrap-Around Program are perhaps evidence of the success of that goal.

Bishop Bowman announced his intention to retire on December 31, 1998, at Diocesan Convention in 1997, and a committee was soon formed to draft a profile of the diocese and initiate the search for the next Bishop of Western New York.