

## HISTORIOGRAPHER'S REPORT

2023

### The Parable of the white chasuble

I love my very part-time job serving as the Archivist and Historiographer of the Diocese of New Jersey. Our diocese has a long, rich and fascinating history going back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. I have church records from colonial days and bishop's papers going back to the late 1700s. This history geek eats this all up with great pleasure.

But there is one aspect (as with all jobs) that I find harder. For when a church closes or merges with another congregation, I have had the responsibility to clear out their records, vestments and liturgical silver and brassware. I visit these spaces, scan the architecture, enjoy the light through the stained glass, imagine the sounds of praise that poured forth from the now silent organ and imagine it filled with worshipers using the Prayer Book and Hymnal in the pews. I look through the parish registers and think of the often thousands of women and men who were baptized, confirmed, married and buried in that place. There are the many things that are left behind, silver and brassware, candles and crosses, and vestments, from humble cottas to gloriously ornate copes. Some can be old and shabby, left in closets since no one knew what to do with them, but many are beautiful and in good shape.

Recycling these items, giving them to those often newly ordained who do not have the resources to purchase them. Home communion sets, deacons' and priests' stoles, tippets, chasubles, and copes have all been put to the use of a new generation of clerics. I really enjoy seeing folks getting to use vestments they could never afford otherwise. Small churches, whose altar hangings and linens have become shabby through decades of use, have also been able to take advantage of these items and often give them pride of place in their worship.

Several months ago, I found a white chasuble (the poncho-like vestment a priest wears to celebrate the Eucharist) that I thought was stunning. It was a

thick-loomed silk garment, with blue banding and a large hand embroidered gold chalice and communion host on the back. The chasuble was so beautiful that, instead of putting on the clothes rack with the other vestments, I hung it from a door in the archives where it could be seen, appreciated and with the hope it would find a good home.

When the Revd Canon Sally French was elected Bishop of New Jersey, she toured the archives and saw the beauty and fine work of this chasuble. She tried it on and it fit as if it had been made for her. So she asked me (!) if she could use it. I couldn't say no and she proceeded to have her entire white consecration vestments made to match this chasuble. It's significance was enhanced when we discovered it had been made by our Diocesan embroiders guild. On Saturday, June 24<sup>th</sup> I had the honor of formally presenting it to our freshly consecrated ordinary, which she then wore to celebrate her first Eucharist as the XIII Bishop of New Jersey.

It is often pointed out that the Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways. I located that white chasuble long before Bishop Sally was on the scene. Jesus talks about how the rejected stone becomes the cornerstone in the divine Kingdom, how a mustard seed planted produces great results, how all the hair on our heads is counted. Five loaves and two fish fed a multitude. This experience leaves me wondering (in the meanings both of pondering and marveling) about those anonymous women decades ago, stitching this garment with love and prayer not knowing their efforts would be crowned by its use by our first female bishop.

Christian people often encounter times when we feel our efforts are insufficient to the task. We can be overwhelmed by how large the job and how small our efforts. But in God's economy and in God's timing, no experience is wasted, no effort is without fruit.

Consider then parable of the chasuble.