



PETER R. BARBER/GAZETTE PHOTOGRAPHER

The Right Rev. William H. Love, bishop of Albany, left, shakes hands with Rev. Paul Frederick Blanch, during his induction ceremony at St. George's Episcopal Church in Schenectady Saturday.

## SCHENECTADY

# St. George's Church gets new rector

## British priest recalls roots of church chartered in 1735

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Waiting nine months for a rector doesn't seem like a long time considering that it's been 200 years since one has crossed the 4,000 miles of "the pond" to take the reins.

A new beginning was made at St. George's Church of Schenectady on Saturday as more than 50 members watched Friar Paul Frederick Blanch take over the keys of the parish during an induction service officiated by the Rev. William Love, the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany.

The British priest who became the parish's 18th rector refreshes the English heritage of St. George's, which was chartered in 1735 under King George II under the Lord Bishop of London. The Rev. William Andrews of Great Britain was the first rector of the church, serving from 1771-73. Going as far back as 1695, British missionaries visited Schenectady, many of whom preached at St. George's as the church was being formed.

The identity of the Stockade district is interwoven with the Colonial Anglican parish of the Episcopal Church, since communities in the 1700s were based around worship.

The love of St. George's today transcends religious denomination

and draws admiration from those who aren't Episcopalian, Blanch said, as the church remains a community landmark.

"It is meaningful to people for its continuity in a world where continuity is lacking," Blanch explained.

Blanch's résumé includes 25 years of priesthood and parish experience, including study at Chichester Theological College in West Sussex, England, as well as a degree in theology from Durham University and other post-graduate education.

Blanch was selected in January, but immigration complications caused a delay that prompted both the Schenectady mayor's and U.S. Rep. Paul Tonko's offices to intercede. After much frustration, Blanch arrived on Oct. 21 with his wife Margaret.

In just a month's time, Blanch added daily Mass from Tuesday to Sunday, along with daily morning and evening prayer, monthly benediction and more occasions for spiritual learning.

### HOPEFUL TIME

The upcoming year brings optimism and challenges, both of which center around the parish's growth.

"Our parish has struggled over the last couple of years not having

a permanent priest," said Erika Pelletier, 37, who lives in Duaneburg with her husband Noel.

Pelletier was married in the church eight years ago and said she has been a member since childhood. After watching the parish's membership rolls shrink, she is optimistic that the new rector will attract more people.

"It's just nice to be able to connect with one person now, just to have consistent leadership in the community and more outreach," she said.

St. George's Senior Warden David Kennison said the parish's numbers are around 150. Kennison has been a member since the '50s, when membership peaked at 500.

Blanch fills a void the parish had since 2007, when the Rev. William David McSwain left, according to Kennison.

Calling Blanch "warm and outgoing," Kennison said the parish is full of spirit after waiting for a new leader: "It has pulled together during this time like no other."

The fancy footwork at Mass — procession and movement — is symbolism for faith, but it's up to people to take what they believe in and do something that reflects what they have learned, Blanch said. There will be more opportunities for Bible study and education in the upcoming year so "people

can be well-informed about their faith," Blanch said.

Pilgrimages are being planned to Jerusalem and the ancient shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk in eastern England, excursions that will help the Bible come alive, he added.

There will also be a push to enlarge the scope of St. George's outreach programs, including those that provide necessities like food and clothing.

Pledge income for St. George's rose 7.8 percent over the year through October, according to treasurer Jon Pearson, but the parish incurred significant expenses, drawing funds from its endowment to pay for the \$308,000 renovation of the rectory. Parking lot improvements and asbestos removal from St. George's House were also on its plate this year.

The church's community activities are numerous, including monthly donations to the Schenectady Inner City Ministry and participation in the its summer lunch program, donations of used cellphones, back-to-school backpacks for foster children as well as participation in coat drives, Toys for Tots and a local jail ministry.

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