

**A brief history of the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota, as told by author and former Archdeacon, the
Rev. Ben Scott**

The mission of the Episcopal Church began long before Minnesota was even a territory. In the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s Ezekiel Gear was chaplain at Fort Snelling at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. Episcopal chaplains also served at the United States fort in Ojibwe country in the north and at the United States fort in the Dakota country in the south. Gear pleaded with Bishop Jackson Kemper, who was given oversight of the entire American northwest, to send mission priests to Minnesota territory. In the 1850s there was a collection of fledgling congregations: three parishes in a string of mission stations along the rivers. The strongest among them was the associate mission of Dr. James Lloyd Breck. He began at St. Paul, coming here from Nashotah, Wisconsin. Then, heeding the summons of the Ojibwe, moved to Gull Lake in Brainerd, and leaving that mission in the hands of Enmegahbowh, first native American ordained deacon and priest in America, Breck moved on to Faribault. The location was in the border country between the Ojibwe and the Dakota and at a startup area for European immigration into the newly seated lands of the native peoples to the United States government.

At Faribault, Breck would realize his vision of an associate mission, a mission in which education was the chief missionary tool, and the bishop the chief missionary. The associate mission was a team ministry of men and women, lay and ordained. The first bishop, Henry Benjamin Whipple, chose Faribault as the see city of the new diocese. There he built the first cathedral in America, founded a residential school for boys, a residential school for girls, and a residential seminary for training missionaries. Breck and Enmegahbowh each have a day in the liturgical calendar of The Episcopal Church, with Bishop Whipple and other strong missionaries. The early years are the golden age of the Diocese of Minnesota.

Bishop Whipple's mission in Minnesota continues to permeate the work of The Episcopal Church here. At a time when racism and warfare characterize the dominant white culture in America, Whipple was, in the 19th century, a clarion in church and state for diversity, justice and mercy. He is best known for his advocacy of the Ojibwe and Dakota people in Minnesota. That call to mission, in a diversity of cultures, continues to animate The Episcopal Church in Minnesota. Inclusion, compassion and advocacy have continued to mark Episcopalians in the social, cultural, ecclesial, liturgical and theological controversies that rage among us. Education has been a significant factor in the mission of Episcopalians, following in the footsteps of Whipple. The residential schools in Faribault continue to flourish, as does the day school, Breck school, in the Western suburbs of Minneapolis. Whipple's seminary, now merged in suburban Chicago as Seabury-Western, is taking a new and creative look at preparing men and women for the mission and ministry of the church. Minnesota's bishop continues to function in all these institutions in this educational ministry.

Two economic and demographic factors have played upon The Episcopal Church. They have left it with a membership that is less than one percent of the state's population. In the 1870s and 1880s, waves of Scandinavian, Slavic, German and Irish immigrants flooded the prairies, forests and waters of the state. They brought with them a strong religious and ethnic identity as Lutherans and Roman Catholics. In addition, economic prosperity and depression played havoc on the institution and the growth potentials

for Episcopalians. The forests came and went, the mines came and went, the prairies came and went, small towns came and went, personal and corporate fortunes came and went, the hopes and dreams of Episcopalians came and went. With all this playing upon Minnesotans, the vision of who Episcopalians are, and what their call to mission would be in large communities and in small eventually became opaque and static-y during its 150 year history.

In 1895 the Diocese was divided into Minnesota out of Faribault, and Duluth, out of that Lake Superior city. In 1944 it was reunited with its cathedral and its administrative center in the hub city of Minneapolis. In spite of its diminishing role in the contemporary religious communities, Episcopalians in Minnesota retain the values that have grown among them throughout its history: acceptance of diversity, advocacy for justice and mercy, tolerance, compassion and inclusion for the social, cultural, ecclesial, liturgical and theological controversies that have challenged them.

In a 21st century context, Minnesota Episcopalians continue to work on a larger scale, valuing Breck and Whipple's model of an associate mission, a team of men and women, lay and ordained, with education as the chief missionary tool and the bishop as the chief missionary.