

A Very Brief History of St. Andrew's, from 1914-2025

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When Madison began to extend its boundaries to the west at the end of the nineteenth century, a new housing development known as University Heights was built on the high ground overlooking the university's new Randall Field. Incorporated into Madison in 1903, it was largely inhabited by university staff, state employees and business and professional people. By 1913, at least fifty residents were Episcopalians, who worshipped at Grace Church on the capitol square, then the city's only Episcopal church. In that era, when automobiles were still rare and unpredictable, traveling the two miles down Regent Street to West Washington Street (passing along the northern edge of the disreputable Greenbush neighborhood and the heavily-traveled railroad line) seemed a long way, especially when one had to rely on foot or horsedrawn carriages.

The women from the Wingra Park and University Heights neighborhoods had begun talking about the possibility of having a small hall in their neighborhood where they could meet for services, and their children could receive religious education nearer home. Their husbands appealed to the bishop of Milwaukee; and the bishop, who was trying to establish a campus ministry, approved the plan, believing that the rector of the new parish could also serve as university chaplain.

On May 4, 1914, the new parishioners met to choose a name for the new church, and organize the parish leadership. The name they chose was St. Andrew's. Arthur Peabody, the university's official architect, was chosen as senior warden, a post he would hold for the next twenty-four years. The parish purchased three lots at the corner of Spooner Street and Stockton Court, and on November 30, 1915 – St. Andrew's Day – they laid the cornerstone. In March, the Rev. Morton C. Stone agreed to serve as the church's first rector (and university chaplain).

By 1926, the congregation had risen to over 73 active families, with 161 children in the Sunday School. The original church building was too small to accommodate the over 300 people involved. City zoning plans ruled out any effort to build a larger structure on their present site, so a new site was purchased in 1927 at the corner of Regent and Roby Streets, across from Randall School. The present church was dedicated on April 1, 1928.

St. Andrew's struggled through the Depression to keep up with two mortgages, but by 1940 things were improving. When World War II ended, the parish – like churches across the US – experienced a boom in attendance, and in 1957 it added a Sunday School wing onto the east side of the church building. By 1960, the parish reported membership of 800 souls, with three services every Sunday. In 1966, the parish purchased the Newell House property on Regent

Street next door, in the hope of being able to expand at some future date.

As the city grew, two more Episcopal churches were added; St. Luke's in 1948, and St. Dunstan's in 1956. In 1965, St. Andrew's attempted to establish a mission parish on Prairie Road between Hammersley and Raymond Roads, to relieve the friction on then over-crowded St. Andrew's. Without the full support of the rector and the bishop, however, the mission collapsed after only three years.

The 1960s were a decade of activism, optimism and idealism, but also a time when church membership nation-wide began to decline, as the Baby Boomers began to question the beliefs of their parents. Parents no longer insisted that their children continue to attend church after they were confirmed at the common age of ten, leading to a sharp drop in Sunday School attendance. By the end of the 1970s, membership in the country's mainline churches had fallen off steeply. At St. Andrew's, membership peaked in 1963 at 1225 baptized souls, falling to 441 in 1977.

The Episcopal church itself was changing rapidly during this time. Women were being allowed to serve in positions of authority; the first female priests were ordained in 1976. St. Andrew's elected its first female vestry member in 1966, junior warden in 1978, and senior warden in 1980; the first girl acolytes began to serve in 1973. The Book of Common Prayer was updated, using more contemporary language, in 1977. The church itself was changing from an organization serving the rich and powerful to what contemporaries called "the thinking man's church," addressing scientific and social issues head-on. Discussions on divorce, abortion rights, and the civil rights of black Americans became commonplace in the parish hall after services.

The period between 1977 and 1997 saw physical changes in the church interior, with the movement of the altar away from the back wall, and the installation of a new organ. A controversial rector, James Davis (1988-1996), resulted in an all-time low membership of 228 communicants. The Rev. Patrick Raymond (1997-2006) brought things back under control, reorganizing the parish's leadership structure and modernizing the office equipment.

Father Andy Jones (2006-2025) oversaw a major renovation project in 2016. During his time as rector, membership rose again, passing the 400 mark by 2018. Then in 2020, the Covid 19 pandemic struck. The church was closed for slightly over a year, and when in-person services began, membership had dropped sharply. As the parish began to rebuild its programs in 2022, new members began to arrive, and by the time Father Andy announced his retirement in June 2025 the parish was beginning to recover.