

Establishment of the American Branch of the Guild of All Souls

An historical address by the Rev'd Thomas J. M. Davis, delivered at the Easter Meeting of the Guild,
Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, New York, 20 April 1963

The history of the Guild of All Souls in the United States is a closely interwoven part of the history of the Catholic movement in the American Church. Like many of the groups forming the movement in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the Guild had its origin in the Church of England.

The English Branch of the Guild of All Souls was founded on 15 March 1873 by Joseph and Walter Plimpton and Edward Frederick Croom who were communicants of St. James's, Hatcham. The Vicar, [the Rev'd Arthur Tooth](#) was the first president. The purpose of the Guild Burial Society was "to provide furniture for Burial according to the use of the Catholic Church so as to set forth the two great doctrines of the Communion of Saints and the Resurrection of the Body; and Intercessory prayer for the Dying and for the repose of the souls of the deceased members and all the faithful departed." The work of the Guild soon attracted the attention of other Churches in England, and from a small parochial group it increased rapidly in membership throughout England.

The work of the Guild dealt with such an integral part of Catholic life and teaching that it was not surprising to discover that a bare six years after its founding at Hatcham there were members in the United States. An extract from the minutes of the Council meeting of the Guild on 28 July 1879 shows the Rev'd C. R. Ward and the Rev'd J. Stewart Smith had sent letters accepting their appointment as "correspondents" for the Guild in America. In 1882 the English Council agreed to a proposal that a committee for America be annually appointed to act for the Guild in that country and to admit applicants. The committee was recognized as duly authorized on 21 November 1882. However, the subordination of the American members to the English branch was proving to be administratively awkward, especially as the membership continued to increase and local branches were founded. Consequently the English Council recorded that they received on 28 March 1884 a "lengthy communication" from the Rev'd L. Pardee asking that the American members be placed in a position of semi-independence with self government. The committee responded by resolving to give the American Committee "full power to act on behalf of the Council in all matters affecting the Guild and its members in America."

A Chicago Branch was formed in 1885 and the appointment of [the Rev'd E. A. Larrabee](#) as Superior was confirmed. The same year the American Committee was authorized to issue its own Intercession paper. Fr. Larrabee succeeded Canon Street as Chair of the American Committee in 1886. In 1888 the New York Branch was approved (as was that of Melbourne, Australia) and the Rev. J. O. S. Huntington was appointed as Superior. With the growth of the American Branch the difficulties of referring all decisions to England for final approval had multiplied beyond all reason. Consequently the English Council received at its 16 April meeting in 1889 a "declaration of independence of the

American Branches". This document was referred to the Annual Meeting for consideration. On 14 May 1889 the Annual Meeting acceded to the request of the Americans and "the Guild of All Souls American Branch" came into being. It was constituted as the English group with its own President, Warden, and Council and with the retention of all finances collected for its own use. The relationship between the two Branches was viewed as being analogous to that of the Church of England and the Episcopal Church.

At the time of its independent establishment the Guild had 457 members of whom 96 were clergy. By 1894 there were 856 members and organized branches in the following cities: Kansas City, Philadelphia, Chicago, Newark, Louisville, New York, Baltimore, Lexington (Kentucky), San Francisco, Camden, Cleveland, Atlantic City, Washington, Jersey City, Alton (Illinois), Milwaukee, Collingdale (Pennsylvania), Haverhill (Massachusetts), [Nashotah](#), and Brooklyn.

The first member of the Episcopate to join the Guild of All Souls was [the Rt. Rev'd Isaac Lea Nicholson](#), IV Bishop of Milwaukee. Bishop Nicholson joined the Guild in 1892 thus becoming the first Bishop on either side of the Atlantic to become a member.

The work of the Guild continued to prosper in the early decades of the twentieth century. An important event in this era was the Solemn Requiem sung on 15 October 1913 in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in New York during the General Convention. "A goodly number of the bishops and deputies attending the convention were present" according to T. E. Smith, the Secretary and Treasurer. By 1931 the Guild was able to claim 10 bishops of the American Church on the rolls. The following year saw the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Guild in America with the addition of 100 new members.

In 1943 the Guild was able to list 34 branches with 1021 active members in branches and unattached. Ten years later the active membership was 1668 and there were 49 branches. In 1963 there were 54 branches reported. The total active membership was 2210 in 1963, with 2789 listed in the rolls of the Faithful Departed. Eight Bishops of the Church now serve on the Council of the Guild.

In this brief survey of the history of the Guild, much has had to be, of necessity, passed over. The work of Churchmen such as Father Joiner and T. E. Smith who led the Guild for so many years can only be continued. The history of the reestablishment of prayer for the faithful departed and the story of the Guild is one of faithful service in preserving and promulgating the doctrine of Eternal life and the relationship which the Church militant bears to that expectant and triumphant. The accomplishments have been manifest: The providing of funeral appointments and vestments; the securing of Requiem Propers in the 1928 Book [of Common Prayer], which were only possible because of the [here the text is illegible] climate created by the work of the Guild. The original purpose of the Guild as expounded so long ago in Hatcham has been faithfully maintained throughout the years and continues to be the basis of its work in the Church.