

St. Judes Ranch for Children

Though its members were never more than four percent of the US population, the Episcopal Church traditionally made up for its size by producing many of America's public servants, much of its art, and a few of its classic hymns. Many who have never heard of the Episcopal Church – many who never attend church – know Episcopal hymns like “Amazing Grace.”

Episcopalians have also long been involved in social justice. So long, in fact, that they were in the business long before the use of that term became a matter of partisan politics.

The Lost and Lonely

Rev. Jack Adam (1932-2007) founded St. Jude's Ranch for Children in 1966 as a spiritual and physical refuge for neglected and abused children. Rev. Adam, priest of St. Matthew's Church in Las Vegas and an amateur entertainer, organized a gala to fund the construction of a children's shelter on 40 acres donated by Boulder City, Nevada.

The gala, which included Frank Sinatra and many of Father Jack's other famous friends, was a success. It later became an annual event. Nuns from the Anglican Sisters of Charity, based in Bristol, England, went to Nevada to care for the children. They eventually came to live in Old Boulder City Hospital, which they re-named Wellspring Retreat House.

In 1970, Rev. Adam handed over control of St. Jude's Ranch to Rev. Herbert Ward. He made quiet donations to children's charities, including his own, for the rest of his life.



Moving forward

Rev. Herbert Ward was a fifth-generation Mississippian and cradle Episcopalian. To take over operations at St. Jude's, he left a lucrative job as a schoolmaster and priest in New Orleans.

At the same time, his commitment to social justice linked him to people far different from him. Reflecting Southern Nevada's demographics, St. Jude's staff and donors were more often Mormons, Jews or Roman Catholics than Episcopalians.

Rev. Ward himself took a St. Jude's resident to his bar mitzvah when he turned 13.

According to Community Relations Manager Veronica Huening, whose family has been involved with St. Jude's for many years, Rev. Ward was a well-loved pastor and shrewd with money. “We were all his sheep,” she said.

By 1980, Rev. Ward and three nuns were responsible for 24 children. St. Jude's had served a total of 177 since its founding. The refuge was also short of money, and had been saved from closing by a multi-million dollar anonymous donation, now known to have come from Father Jack's old friend, Frank Sinatra.

The Chapel of the Holy Family, on the grounds of St. Jude's Ranch, was completed around 1984 and dedicated by Bishop Stewart Zabriskie. At one point, the chapel offered three services every day.

On November 9, 1997, Rep. John Ensign (R - Nev.) introduced H.R. 2989 to Congress, requesting another 40-acre parcel of land for a second campus for St. Jude's. Rev. Ward and a former member of St. Jude's, Jean-Claude Holly, Jr. testified before congress. The bill does not appear to have passed.

In 1999, Rev. Ward seems to have tried to find a replacement in 42-year-old Navy Reserve chaplain Rev. William C. Cantrell, Jr. Instead, St. Jude's came under the control of a secular board of directors one year later, when Rev. Ward retired.

St. Jude's continues to provide care to abused and neglected children from its Boulder City location, as well as two campuses in Texas.

Its current social media and advertisements could lead some to think that the spiritual side of St. Jude's had been forgotten. A visit to the campus would not.

Chapel of the Holy Family

Like a number of southwestern Episcopal churches, the Chapel of the Holy Family has a Spanish Mission-style exterior. Unlike the rest, it is a careful blending of styles from around the world.

The interior also has a Greek-style apse, which has made it a popular wedding chapel. Like a medieval English church, Holy Family has a bell tower at the west end, and a porch on the south. It seats up to 100.

The bell tower was originally a parachute-drying tower at Nellis Air Force Base; the nave is a Quonset hut, probably of similar origin. Davis D'Ambly, one of the last artists who still has the skills to maintain America's historic churches, helped the children of St. Jude's to paint the interior.

Mass is now said twice weekly at the chapel by Rev. Bernardo Iniesta-Avila. St. George's Anglican Church, in Las Vegas, has an annual Lenten spiritual retreat here