St. Stephen’s Integrates in 1957

Following World War II, African-Americans began to move into Columbia Heights. St. Stephen’s, like most white churches, struggled to adapt. Some churches moved to the suburbs, including the Presbyterian church in the building that now houses Canaan Baptist.


2. A special meeting of the Vestry was called on November 13, 1955, at which Bishop Dun made it clear to St. Stephen’s that his choice for Rector was the Rev. William Wendt, who Bishop Dun believed would push St. Stephen’s further on integration. Three months later, a divided parish called Bill Wendt as Rector once he promised to celebrate the eucharist daily.


4. After a great deal of discussion about “parish policies,” including meetings with the Rt. Rev. Angus Dun, Bishop of Washington, St. Stephen’s made its decision with a formal vestry resolution, reproduced in part at left: “that the registry of this Parish remain open to all who seek our churchmanship.”

5. However, many white members objected. The intense pressure caused Gast to have mental health problems, leading to him resigning as Rector in March 1960.