

Beloved priest remembered

By **CAROLYN SMITH**
Staff Writer

When the congregation of Holy Cross Episcopal Church, 420 N. Main St., Poplar Bluff, learned of the passing of Rev. Richard A. "Dick" Bamforth, of Augusta, Maine, two members of the congregation reminisced about the six years when Rev. Bamforth served as their rector at Holy Cross.

"He came to us in 1960," Evelyn Whitworth recalled. "This was one of the most important and historic times in our nation's history."

Carol Mott Morse remembered, "Our church had been without a priest for some time when my husband, Graham Mott and Bob Hyde heard about Rev. Bamforth who was a rector at Grace Church in Kirkwood, Mo. at the time. They drove to St. Louis, interviewed him, hired him on the spot, returning to inform the vestry what they had done. Not exactly proper protocol, but what was done was done and," she added, "as it turned it we were better for it."

Both ladies agreed, Rev. Bamforth went by the book. Evelyn was the only Sunday school teacher, but still he met with me every week to discuss the program. "I learned so much from him," she said. He was a learned man. He had majored in French and the classics at Bowdoin College and after further study at Middlebury College he taught French, Latin, and social studies before enlisting in the U. S. Army during the Korean War. In the Army Security Agency he studied the Russian language in Monterey, Calif., spending the rest of his tour

of duty in communications reconnaissance on the border between the American and Soviet Zones of divided Germany.

Inspired by a German Lutheran pastor who reached out to American GIs, Bamforth shifted his directions and, upon release from the Army, entered Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, graduating with the degree of Master of Divinity in 1958. He was ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church, and retired in 1992.

"Rev. Bamforth and his wife, Pat, added so much to our congregation and to the community," Evelyn said. "They had only been married a short time when they came to us. Their two daughters, Jeanne and Margaret were born in Poplar Bluff. He christened my son, Steve, and Carol's son, John Mott."

"Although the congregation embraced him," Carol added, "some of the community was not as enamored as our congregation. To say the least, he was very progressive and controversial. During his tenure, 1960-66, the civil rights movement was in full swing. Rev. Bamforth worked tirelessly to integrate the city swimming pool."

"I wouldn't say we 'marched'," Evelyn added, "but we all showed up en masse at the pool when it was opened as an integrated facility and accomplished it without incident. It was a great day for Poplar Bluff."

"This, in itself, did not endear Rev. Bamforth to some members of our community," Carol explained. "To compound matters, in 1964, he brought a young priest here for two months.

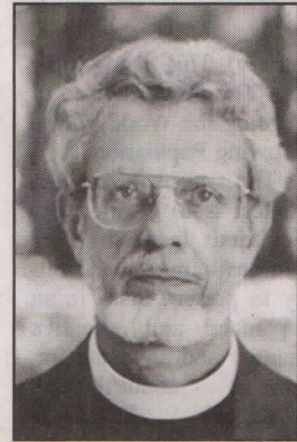
Rev. Arthur G. Kahongue from Tanzania, along with his wife, Grace, served Holy Cross along with Rev. Bamforth for approximately two months," Carol said.

"He lived in the house on Big Bend Road," Evelyn laughed. "You can imagine it wasn't a common occurrence in Poplar Bluff during the 1960s to see a black man wearing his clergy collar strolling down Big Bend Road."

Carol added, "Rev. Bamforth not only brought Rev. Kahongue to Holy Cross, but he took him to the other three Episcopal Churches in the area at the time — Hayti, Carutherville, and Portageville — imagine that if you will?"

Although he was progressive and controversial, Rev. Bamforth was also outgoing and worked extremely well with other clergy in the area. During his tenure, Holy Cross and Sacred Heart Catholic Church held Lenten studies together. In 1964, Holy Cross played host for the Missouri Diocesan Convention, filling all the motel rooms and many of the extra bedrooms in the homes of members of the congregation. The meetings were held in the sanctuary of the First Methodist Church because Holy Cross couldn't accommodate the crowds. "This was a wonderful event," Carol said, "for Holy Cross and our community."

Both ladies agreed: Rev. Bamforth and his wife, Pat, were wonderful people and have a special place in the history and heart of Holy Cross. Steven Whitworth said, "As an example of his goodness, when my father died, Rev. Bamforth offered to fly out here to officiate at dad's funeral



Rev. Richard A. "Dick" Bamforth rector at Holy Cross Episcopal Church, 420 N. Main St., Poplar Bluff, Mo. — 1960 - 1966.

service. That's the kind of compassionate man he was."

When Rev. Bamforth was called as Rector of St. Mary's Church, Rockport, Mass., in 1966, the congregation wished him well with heavy hearts. Many members of the congregation remained in touch with the Bamforths, but the connection didn't end there.

Our current rector, Rev. Annette Joseph, formerly of Maine, recalls, "Dick was a chaplain during one of the times I was interviewing for candidacy. He was so supportive you just wanted to be in his presence. It was very calming during a stress-filled day. When I got the call to Holy Cross as priest we were at a clergy conference together. He grabbed my arm when I told him I had been called and said, 'My goodness Annette, you've taken me back 50 years.' He was delighted to know of the connection and wrote the church a letter as I was ordained here six years ago on Jan. 20. He and Pat always kept in touch wanting to know how we were doing and offering support."

His time on Earth came to a close, Friday, Jan. 6, 2017 at the age of 86.