

Grace Centennial

A Memoir of the Embroidery Guild of Grace Church

Introduction: by Mary Ann Burkhalter

One of the most fascinating service organizations in the rich history of Grace Episcopal Church was the Embroidery Guild. This group of dedicated and talented women created the beautiful vestments and hangings which are such an important part of our services and ceremonies.

Research conducted by your Centennial Committee has revealed a number of valuable documents recording the activities of this Guild. Here, we are presenting a report attributed to one of the organization's most devoted and beloved members, Betty Frank. It was transcribed from her original hand-written account.

Much of the work done by the guild was accomplished during the tenure of the Reverend Peter J. Brownlee, who served as priest from 1953-1964. Clearly, he and Mrs. (Kay) Brownlee enthusiastically encouraged and aided these gifted ladies in their efforts.

Countless hours were spent in constructing and hand embroidering these masterpieces with designs depicting sacred symbols of our Faith. Each set, traditionally created in the rich colors of the church year – purple, green, white and red – was fabricated of the finest materials available and then meticulously embroidered using silk, golden and silvery threads.



For those readers who are not familiar with some of the terms used in the report, definitions included here may prove helpful. Each of the elements defined has long been a key part of our historic rituals.

Burse: The case, (somewhat like a hard-bound book) covered in rich fabric and embroidery, which encloses the **corporal**, a linen square used with the communion vessels. The burse sits atop a **veil**, a richly decorated cloth which is draped over the chalice upon the altar.

Hangings are the intricately embroidered banners which are suspended at the front of the pulpit and the lectern. They are often part of a matching set which includes a **frontal** – the covering for the front of the altar. Some frontals are long and cover the entire face of the altar; others are shorter and provide an ornamental edging at the front of the altar.

The **chasuble** is the loose-fitting, poncho-like garment that the priest wears while performing the communion service. This covers the **stole**, the long strip of cloth worn around the priest's neck to symbolize the yoke of obedience to Christ. The **maniple** is a narrow strip of fabric that used to be worn over the left arm of the priest, slightly above the wrist.



The **funeral pall** was traditionally used as a covering for the coffin at a funeral service. As fewer and fewer coffins are brought into the sanctuary for services in modern times, the pall is sometimes used to cover the vessel holding the decedent's ashes.

One can only imagine the love and work it took to create these beautiful objects. Indeed, we treasure this account of the contributions of the Embroidery Guild.

Embroidery Guild Memoir attributed to Betty Frank

Following (with spelling and grammar corrections and amendments) is a copy of the original report.

On April 2, 1973, I removed from the ecclesiastical embroidery frame our red chasuble, the last to be made and the culmination of a 20-year dream that started with Father Brownlee and Mary Hannington. When plans were made to start our new church, these two dreamed of having beautiful handmade hangings and chasubles to match in all four colors of the church year. This was really a dream.

Continued on next page.

Mary Hannington embraced the dream. She assembled a number of women to begin the green set. They were able to go to the Covina Church [Holy Trinity] once a month for ecclesiastical embroidery lessons given by Josephine Jardine. The lessons were paid for by the Diocese of Los Angeles, the only diocese that did this at that time. Hence, the diocese has the most beautiful hangings in their churches. In return for our lessons, we were to pay back the church by making a burse or veil for one of the fast-growing missions springing up across the county.



When I joined them, they had finished the green hangings and the burse and veil in the pomegranate design. Mary was working on the front of the green chasuble. This is a beautiful piece and her work is lovely – so even and straight. If one stitch went in crooked, out it came, as I discovered when working on the purple hanging – and had to take out a whole night's work! We got together once a week and spent the evening sewing together, and Father and Kay (Brownlee) came often to watch and cheer us on. The purple set was finished and we started on the white hangings, burse and veil. We made two burses and veils in each color, plus many for the missions. The red set, Mary did while we were working on the altar hangings.



The red hangings and the purple funeral pall were completed and it was while we were working on the high altar frontal that Mary got sick. Sick as she was, she forced herself to finish the descending dove in the center of the frontal because she knew no one could do the work like she could.

After she died, we continued to work and finished the red maniple and stole...the white chasuble, and [then] finally, the red chasuble.

While Mary Belle Higbee Lewis was president of The Daughters of the King, it was voted to give the money for the red vestments. I remember the look on Mary [Hannington's] face when she sweetly told them that it would be a while before that red chasuble would be finished because it was the least-used color and would be last. If she had only known how long it would be, she would have been shocked! Not often are pieces made which require so many, many hours of labor.