

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Franklin, Tennessee

Story by Scott Smith • Photos by Dan Hardison

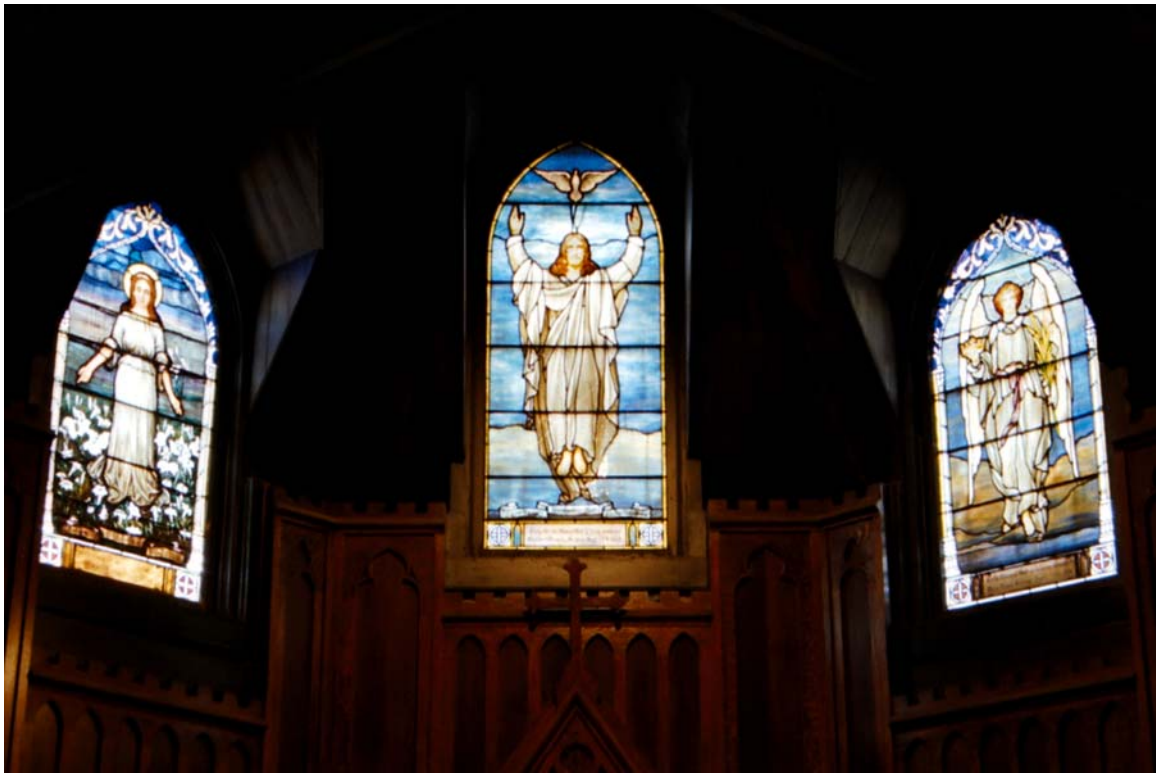
St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Franklin, Tennessee, was the first Episcopal Church established in Tennessee, but the ravages of the Civil War would leave the church in ruins. When St. Paul's was finally restored, it would change structurally and be fitted with eight stained glass windows by the master of stained glass, Louis Comfort Tiffany. It not only continues to serve the people of Franklin today, but it is also regarded warmly as the "Mother Church of the Diocese of Tennessee."

St Paul's was founded in 1827 by The Rev. James Hervey Otey – later to become the first Bishop of Tennessee. The brick building was completed in 1834 and was considered a "three-decker" building that included the nave, slave galleries, and an undercroft. It also included a 50-



foot bell tower. A silver communion service was ordered from New Orleans as a gift from the female parishioners.

From the beginning of the Civil War, Federal Troops occupied Franklin and St. Paul's Church was used by the troops as a barracks. The pews and pulpit were used for firewood and fires were built where the altar once stood with the tower used as a smokestack. Organ pipes were thrown in the street to be gathered by local children and rode like stick horses. The stained glass windows were all smashed. The interior columns were damaged from building watering troughs for the horses – damage that is still visible today. Even the church linen became saddlecloths for the commanders' horses. The only items to be saved were the Parish Register and the altar silver, which were buried across the street by church members.



ABOVE: Altar windows by Louis Comfort Tiffany. *Virgin in a Field of Lilies* (Left), *Christ Ascending with Dove* (Center), *Archangel with Crown of Everlasting Life and Palm Branch* (Right)

Following the bloody Battle of Franklin in 1864 (sometimes called “The Gettysburg of the West”), St. Paul’s was used as a hospital for wounded troops – first by Federal troops and later by Confederate troops. By the end of the War, the thick walls were all that remained intact.

For years after the war, the church was used as a carpenter’s shop and a stable for horses. The congregation was faced with the monumental task of rebuilding their beloved church. They filed a lawsuit against the Federal Government for undue damage suffered by the church during the War. It would be 1902 before the lawsuit against the government was finally won and a settlement reached.

The long task of rebuilding St. Paul’s began in 1869. The roof was lowered twenty feet and the slave galleries removed. The leftover bricks were then used to build Founder’s Hall behind the church that served as a rectory for the priest.

Between 1902 and 1915, several memorials were donated by prominent families that included the eight stained glass windows created by Louis Comfort Tiffany. Money received from the settlement with the Government was used for



upgrades that included Gothic oak paneling and a carved oak lectern.

St. Paul's Church celebrated its centennial in 1927 with much fanfare. However, the Great Depression would see its membership decline and dwindle to only a handful of the faithful. St. Paul's would remain almost non-functioning until the 1950's when an energetic priest named Bill Ray arrived. The parish began a period of new growth, which has continued to the present day.

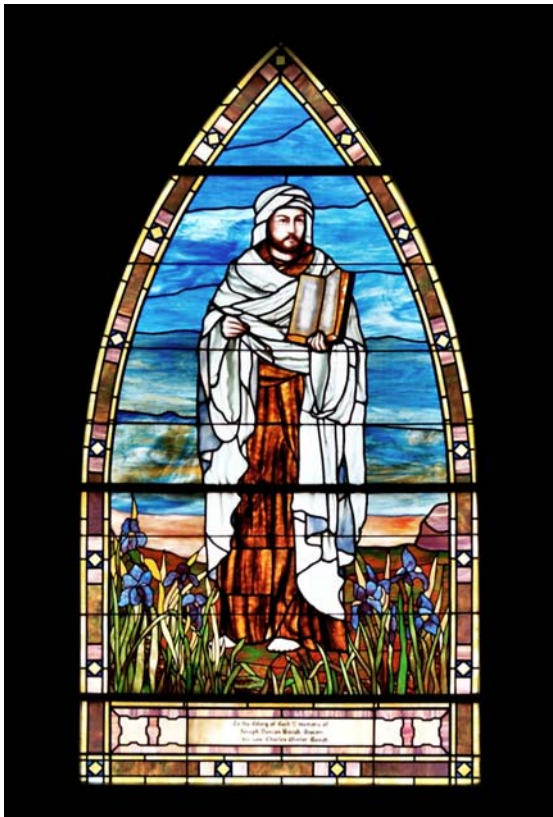
There are now over one thousand members and rather than expand or leave their beloved church, the parishioners conduct six weekly services divided between two full-time priests. The church also operates with the slogan "Our Doors Are Always Open" and the church is truly never locked, a rarity in modern times.

St. Paul's Church remains today much as it was after it was resurrected from the ruins of the war that divided our nation. Its history and Tiffany windows are a befitting legacy for Mother Church of the Diocese of Tennessee. †



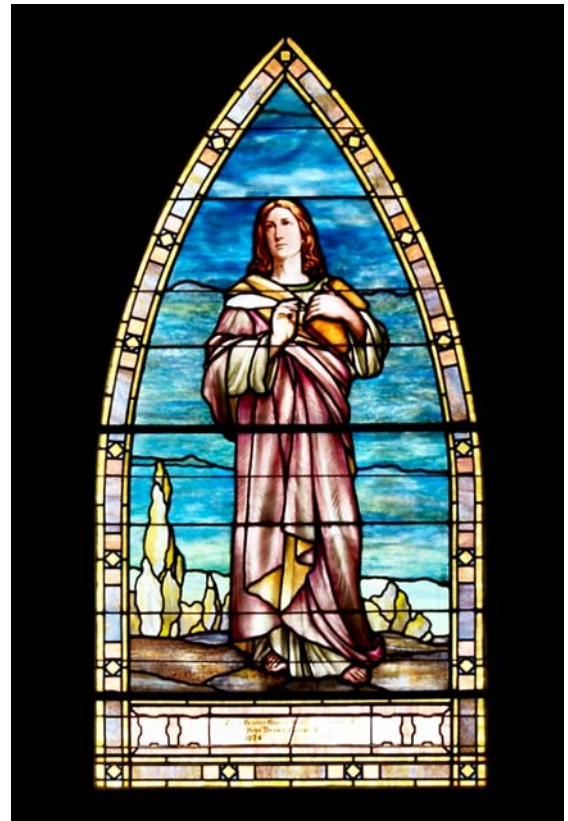
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
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ABOVE: Carved oak lectern
BELOW LEFT: *St. Stephen in Field of Iris*
(Not a Tiffany window)
BELOW RIGHT: *Jesus Knocking*
(Window by Louis Comfort Tiffany)





ABOVE: *St. Paul Addressing Damascus*
 BELOW: *Angel at Empty Tomb*
 (Both windows by Louis Comfort Tiffany)



ABOVE: *St. John*
 BELOW: *Christ in Field of Lilies*
 (Both windows by Louis Comfort Tiffany)

