

PRELIMINARY REPORT TO THE CHAPTER OF CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL  
FROM THE  
CATHEDRAL DISCERNMENT TASK FORCE

APRIL 14, 2015

In July 2014, Bishop Ian Douglas convened the Cathedral Discernment Task Force and issued the following two-part charge: What type of cathedral, if any, is needed by the ECCT as it lives more fully into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? What is the vocation, going forward, of Christ Church Cathedral?

Rather than address these questions in the abstract, the Task Force decided to focus, initially, on *purpose* and *function*. What should cathedrals “be” in this day and age? What, if anything, is their purpose? And what should cathedrals “do”? What functions should they perform for the benefit of the whole church within their ecclesial boundaries? Once purpose and function become clear, the Task Force will be in a position to discern what kind of cathedral, if any, is needed by the ECCT going forward, and to discern what that vision says about the future of Christ Church Cathedral.

The Task Force began its work by reading up on the history of cathedrals, in England and the United States. What has been their purpose? What has been their function? Have these changed over time? If so, why, and in what ways? The Task Force also reviewed a wide range of commentary on the nature of cathedrals.

Next, the Task Force solicited input from the Cathedral Chapter in October 2014 and from the Cathedral congregation in November. In December, the Task Force took its show on the road, beginning with a joint leadership gathering of the Executive Council, Standing Committee, Commission on Ministry, and Donations and Bequests Board. In February 2015, the Task Force was scheduled to conduct listening sessions at six sites across the state. However, it canceled the session because of low registration. In March, the Task Force invited input from participants at the annual diocesan Spring Training gathering. Later that month, it invited input from clergy who gathered at the Cathedral to renew their ordination

vows. In May, the Task Force will meet over dinner with a representative group of wardens and lay leaders. Other gatherings are being contemplated as well.

At the October 2014 Chapter meeting, the cathedral discernment conversation was structured around the “four C’s” that have emerged from the work of TREC and TREC-CT. How might a cathedral function as a convener, connector, catalyst, and capability-builder for the benefit of the whole church in Connecticut? In all of its other conversations, the Task Force invited participants to consider the following questions:

- What are some possible purposes of a cathedral in this age?
- How does a cathedral differ from a parish church ... or does it?
- Is there a place for a cathedral in the Episcopal Church in CT?
- If “Yes”, what might that look like in the context of living out God’s mission in and through the ECCT?
- If a cathedral building is envisioned, where should it be located?
- If a cathedral without walls is envisioned, what might that look like?

Although the Task Force has not completed its information gathering, much less its discernment, it has prepared this preliminary report to the Cathedral Chapter. It has provided this “heads up” out of concern that the Chapter will have very little time (i.e. regularly-scheduled meetings in July and October) in which to absorb the Task Force’s recommendations and fashion a response on behalf of Christ Church Cathedral.

Based on its information gathering and discernment to date, the Task Force has identified four purposes and four functions that appear to be especially salient as the Episcopal Church in Connecticut faces into the future. After briefly outlining them, this report will address their implications for the questions that the Task Force is charged with answering.

## Purposes of a Cathedral for Connecticut

### 1. Symbol and embodiment of our common identity as the Episcopal Church in Connecticut

In conversation after conversation, clergy and laity alike stressed the significant role that cathedrals can and should play in helping Episcopalians in Connecticut maintain and express their common identity. This yearning has been articulated to the Task Force in a variety of ways. Cathedrals are “a unique expression of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” “Wherever I travel, I visit the cathedral and feel that I am home.” Cathedrals enable me “to feel a part of something larger.” Cathedrals have “an iconic function.” “A cathedral belongs to everyone, not just to those who worship there. “A cathedral should be a place where you can say ‘this is our church,’ not ‘this is my church.’” A cathedral should be a place that “encourages us to live outside our silos.” “A cathedral should be a symbol of our unity as Episcopalians. After all, we are not Congregationalists.”

This latter quote echoes what Bishop Chauncey Brewster said when he first proposed that a cathedral be designated for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. As historian Nelson Rollin Burr put in in The Story of the Diocese of Connecticut (p. 209), “Bishop Brewster believed that it was not generally recognized that the diocese, rather than the parish, is the real unit of church life. He was convinced that the most effective spiritual tie would be a cathedral.” Or as Bishop Brewster himself put it in his address to the 1912 Diocesan Convention, “The Cathedral is to be a Diocesan House of God and a Symbol of the Unity of the Diocese.”

### 2. Public face and voice of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut

Not only do cathedrals manifest our unity for the sake of the faithful. They embody and “represent” the Episcopal Church to the world beyond our many red doors. This, too, has been articulated in a number of ways. “The cathedral represents the broader church and makes a statement about what the broader church is and stands for, beyond what a local parish can do. The cathedral speaks to the larger identity of the church as a whole.” For people who are not Episcopalian, “the cathedral is who we are.” Cathedrals provide “a voice for the issues of the day; embracing all religions and a voice for those who have none.”

### 3. A house of prayer and devotion

In conversation after conversation, the importance of having a cathedral that exemplifies the Episcopal Church at prayer was emphasized. Some expressed a strong desire for a cathedral that maintains the highest traditions of “Anglican worship,” with that phrase signifying a particular liturgical style. Others expressed a strong desire for a cathedral that maintains the highest traditions of “Anglican worship,” meaning a catholicity of liturgical expression. Common to all is an understanding that cathedrals should be centers of worship and devotion, and should play a key role in fostering liturgical excellence. Historian Nelson Burr reports that Bishop Brewster had this in mind from the outset. In encouraging the faithful to generously support the newly designated cathedral with bequests and memorial gifts, Bishop Brewster stressed that the cathedral “would welcome the throngs in the street and offer them services of ‘simple stateliness’ to elevate the standard of reverence, worship, and devotion.”

### 4. An extension of the Bishop’s apostolic call

By definition, cathedrals serve as the bishop’s “seat.” However, as the Task Force has frequently noted, for the first 75 years of the Episcopal Church’s existence our bishops managed to get along quite nicely without a designated place to sit. Bishop Seabury was firmly of the view that his cathedra traveled with him.

To be sure, there is much to be said for designating a church where bishops can comfortably celebrate and worship whenever they do not have official responsibilities elsewhere. However, it is the cathedral’s role as an extension of the Bishop’s unique calling to be an apostle that has captured the attention of the Task Force. Bishops are sent into the world to make Christ known and manifest, and to carry the faithful along with them, eager to participate in God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation. Thus, if a cathedral is to be “the bishop’s church” in more than a trivial or tautological sense, it needs to meaningfully support the bishop in his or her role as chief missionary.

This theme was echoed by the clergy who gathered on Holy Tuesday at noon to renew their ordination vows, having spent the morning “encountering God in the neighborhood.” Although many different formulations were offered, on priest

summed it up succinctly: “cathedrals are a place to connect and do missionary work.”

## Functions of a Cathedral for Connecticut

Apart from the October 2014 Chapter meeting, the Task Force did not use the TREC framework to structure the conversation. However, time and again its conversation partners relied upon the four C’s (convener, connector, catalyst, and capability builder) to express how a cathedral (or more than one cathedral) might serve the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. Similarly, when the Task Force sat down in March to assess its own sense of things, it gravitated toward the four C’s as a useful way to frame what cathedrals can and should do.

### 1. Convener

In some ways, this is the most obvious of the functions that cathedrals perform. At the same time, it is among the most perplexing as we seek to discern the future, because so many of our accustomed ways of gathering together are no longer being practiced. Many people have lamented the fact that diocesan conventions are no longer held at Christ Church Cathedral, and that ordinations and confirmations there are rarer and smaller than they used to be. The sense of loss is palpable, even though nearly everyone applauds the “new” table-based Convention format. And the sense of loss persists even though The Commons has emerged as a marvelous place for many groups to gather.

The good news is that there is a widespread hunger to experience firsthand the breadth of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. However, what, if anything, a cathedral might do to address this hunger is less clear than it used to be. A starting point is to recognize the importance of gathering as a whole *for worship and devotion*. As one participant in the joint leadership gathering put it, “The Commons is a great place for meetings, but we also need a *spiritual* home.” That said, it may be that we can experience our spiritual connectedness in gatherings that are smaller in scope than a diocesan convention. If so, the question for present purposes is whether a cathedral can play a significant part in facilitating them.

In addition, it may be that a cathedral can provide support for gatherings that are worship-full even if they are not worship-centered. Participants in one of the Spring Training workshops explored ways in which a cathedral might convene lay ministers who normally labor in separate vineyards. Church musicians, acolytes, altar guild members, and the like. Another workshop proposed that in our increasingly networked age cathedrals might serve as the “home base” for non-liturgical communities of practice that draw inspiration from being in a place that is saturated with prayer. The Faith Behind Bars and Beyond network, which holds its annual conference at Christ Church Cathedral, comes readily to mind.

To be sure, every parish has some capacity to convene. At issue for the Task Force is whether a cathedral is uniquely able, by virtue of that designation and the responsibilities that flow from it, at gathering people together.

## 2. Connector

At their best, cathedrals historically have displayed a gift for connecting – with those who nurture the soul through the arts; who respond to human need; who pursue justice; who inhabit other faith traditions; who eschew religion. If anything, there is an even greater need for cathedrals to display these charisms in the increasingly secular, diverse, polarized, and complex 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The Task Force heard from many who affirmed this need. Several spoke of cathedrals’ unique capacity to be prophetic, and to speak truth to power. As one person put it, cathedrals “can stretch and pull the church.” Another noted that “cathedrals can and should be inviting to outsiders, the non-churched, and those who have been scarred by the church.” Another suggested that cathedrals may be uniquely gifted in “speaking to a generation that does not understand religious tradition.”

Others spoke of the role that cathedrals might play in the corridors of power. Because they are viewed by the outside world as speaking authoritatively on behalf of the church, cathedrals are uniquely positioned to represent the church’s interests in matters of public policy.

Several speakers addressed the use of cathedral space. The general theme was that it should not be hoarded. Some stressed the symbolic and practical

importance of sharing space with outside organizations. One priest cited with approval Christ Church Cathedral's role as a host for Moral Monday protests, (even as she gently chastised the Cathedral for not publicizing the event well). Another person expressed the hope that an Episcopal cathedral in Connecticut would be open to all traditions for retreats and as a place to practice peace. In a similar vein, several participants spoke approvingly of the role that cathedrals elsewhere play in fostering interfaith and interreligious dialogue.

### 3. Catalyst

Much of the literature about cathedrals speaks of the relative freedom that they have (as compared to parishes) to be creative and experimental. This is true with respect to liturgy, and it is even more powerfully true when it comes to mission. In part, this is because of the unique relationship that cathedrals have to the bishop, the chief missionary of the diocese. And in part it is because cathedrals are rarely tethered by the most backward-looking, cautious, or fearful members of their congregations. For better or worse, the governance structure of most cathedrals limits the veto power that is often exercised the most recalcitrant members of a parish. Moreover, the culture of cathedrals is such that most parishioners internalize a prophetic impulse, whether they want to or not.

This rings true in Connecticut. In conversation after conversation, the Task Force has been told that cathedrals are free to take risks that parishes cannot. That they are free to try things on, free to fail, and free to abandon projects that do not bear fruit. This view is shared by the members of Christ Church Cathedral, who appear to understand that with this freedom comes an obligation – to explore uncharted territory and blaze a trail for others. In other words, the obligation to serve as a mission catalyst on behalf of the larger church.

### 4. Capability builder

When cathedrals develop new mission fields and engage other parishes in the effort, they increase the overall capacity of the Episcopal Church to participate in God's mission. Similarly, when cathedrals devise ways to gather the faithful in devotion and worship, they increase the overall capacity of the Episcopal Church to glorify God. Whenever cathedrals purposefully model how to be the church,

and do so in a way that invites participation, reflection and correction, they increase the overall capability of the church.

There are two domains, not yet addressed, in which the Task Force's conversation partners suggest that cathedrals can make a significant mark as capability builders. A surprising number of people stressed the role that cathedrals can play in providing spiritual direction for the whole church and in promoting theological learning. Perhaps this should not have come as a surprise. After all, these are among the most ancient and venerable functions that cathedrals have played. Moreover, they are consistent with the bishop's unique calling to be a teacher and spiritual leader. If the cathedral is to be "the bishop's church," then it should be an extension of this calling as well (i.e. in addition to being an extension of the bishop as chief missionary).

The Task Force notes that this particular understanding, of the cathedral as a site for spiritual and theological learning, appears to be a growing edge for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.

## **Implications**

Given the continued salience of the purposes and functions outlined above, it is highly likely that the Task Force will recommend that the Episcopal Church in Connecticut continue to support a cathedral, or perhaps more than one. In saying this, the Task Force is mindful of the concern, expressed by its own members as well as others, that it has not been sufficiently clear or careful in articulating that "no cathedral" is a legitimate outcome. At the same time, it is worth noting that several people have expressed the view that the Task Force would not be posing these questions were it not for a desire on the part of the powers that be to "do away with the cathedral." It is also worth noting that to date only one person has forcefully argued that Connecticut should not have a cathedral, and a handful of others have expressed mild skepticism.

Several people have made the case for there being more than one cathedral. Primarily this has been based on geography (i.e. cathedrals in each of the four corners of the state) although it has also been suggested that different cathedrals might perform different functions. So far, the Task Force has not yet given this



Careful thought. As respects where the cathedral (or cathedrals) should be located, the Task Force has received relatively little input. Some have suggested that a central location is best; other have proposed sub-cathedrals that are geographically spread out, with a principal cathedral in Hartford. Other suggestions include that the cathedral should be in a major city; that it should be in Hartford because it is the state capitol; that it should be in a location that is accessible by public transit.

The Task Force is aware that every conceivable location has virtues and drawbacks, and that no single place can easily accommodate all the functions that have been identified. Despite the inadequacy of any single physical space or combination of spaces, it is unlikely that it will recommend that the cathedral be entirely without walls. As one Spring Training participant put it, “bricks, mortar and dirt are sacramental in a way that air is not.” Likewise, the Task Force is unlikely to recommend that the cathedral rotate between spaces since the logistics of doing so would be overwhelming.

The Task Force is likely to stress that a designated cathedral (or cathedrals) should not be constrained by the limitations of the space that it occupies. It should identify spaces, external as well as internal, that are best suited to each of its functions. For example, a bricks and mortar cathedral in an urban setting might link up with a rural camp and conference center to develop a rich and varied program of spiritual development. A Cathedral with inflexible seating might pair with a nearby institution that allows for more options. **It is important to recognize that ultimately a cathedral is a set of responsibilities and not merely a physical location.**

By July 2015, the Task Force will lay out its findings in detail. The Cathedral Chapter and the Cathedral parish will then have an opportunity to discern whether the vision of a cathedral that emerges is one that Christ Church Cathedral is willing and able to embrace. How Christ Church Cathedral responds will have a significant bearing on the proposal that the Task Force ultimately presents to the Diocesan Convention in November.