

CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL
On the Corner of Church and Main Streets in Downtown Hartford

PORTRAIT OF AN ENGAGED CATHEDRAL
2014-2015
[October 2014 Version]

The Episcopal Church in Connecticut is engaged in a Diocesan-wide conversation about the nature of Cathedrals in the 21st Century. At the center of this exploration is a deceptively simple question: How might a Cathedral help the church address the challenges presented by our changing world in order to more faithfully participate in God’s mission of reconciliation and restoration?

It is critically important that the conversation proceed without any presuppositions. At the same time, “what is” should not be ignored. On the contrary, it is important that the conversation be informed by the ways in which Christ Church Cathedral has been living into its best understanding of the role cathedrals ought to play in the here and now. I have prepared this summary of Christ Church Cathedral’s ongoing efforts to serve the diocese and engage wider world on behalf of the whole church and for the sake of the Gospel.

Some of these efforts are exploratory. Others are well underway, and some have been in existence for years. I have sorted them into three overlapping categories that correspond to roles cathedrals have traditionally played throughout much of Anglican history – Seeking the Welfare of the City; Engaging the Arts; Engaging the Diocese.

SEEKING THE WELFARE OF THE CITY

1. Embracing Those Whom We Have Cast Out

The Onesimus Project is an emerging church-based effort to foster the successful reentry into “the free world” of people who have been incarcerated. This would be accomplished through a network of congregations across the diocese and across religious denominations that commit to welcoming and integrating inmates into their faith communities while they are still imprisoned. On a monthly or perhaps weekly basis, inmates would be furloughed (i.e. temporarily

released from prison) for several hours at a time to participate in regularly-scheduled church activities.

This project has arisen out of an ongoing gathering of Episcopal and United Church of Christ clergy committed to social justice. In designing the project, inviting congregations to participate in it, and developing the materials needed to equip the saints, we are working closely with the Department of Corrections, Faith Behind Bars and Beyond (an existing network with our Diocese), the Greater Hartford Reentry Council, and other community groups, in addition to our fellow clergy.

2. Addressing the Needs of Hartford's At-Risk Youth

Nutmeg Big Brothers and Big Sisters is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping children between the ages of 6 and 18 reach their full potential. Thanks to a grant from the Tow Foundation, the agency has initiated a project to provide mentors for young people who are caught up in the juvenile justice system. We seek to partner with Big Brothers and Big Sisters by inviting Episcopalians from across the Diocese to serve as mentors, and by working with the agency to equip the faithful to work with at-risk children.

As noted above, this project is funded by the Tow Foundation. Indeed, it was the Foundation that initially introduced us to Big Brothers and Big Sisters. We are exploring collaborations with other Tow Foundation grantees as well.

Boys Scouts and Girl Scouts. We are exploring the feasibility of establishing scout troops at the Cathedral for children who take advantage of our feeding and clothing programs. BSA and GSA would supply the troop leaders and design the program; we would recruit members and supply space. We are also exploring the feasibility of establishing BSA and GSA troops for children whose parents are incarcerated. If we proceed, the goal would be to develop model programs that could be adopted by parishes across the Diocese.

3. Stitching the City Together

The iQuilt Project is a federally-funded effort to make Hartford more livable and walkable by expanding, improving, and linking its greens spaces, improving its public transportation, and stitching its arts spaces and architectural features into

a coherent whole. Because of the Cathedral's visibility in the City, I have been asked to serve on iQuilt's board of corporators. In addition, we have been in conversation with iQuilt's executive director to discuss ways in which the Cathedral might directly further the organization's purposes. As a consequence, we have made ourselves visible at public events such as the groundbreaking for the renovation of Bushnell Park; have worked with our near neighbors -- including the Hartford Stage, Capital Community College, and the office tower popularly dubbed "the Stilts Building" -- to explore ways to turn our block into a European-style "Square;" and have advocated for turning a portion of Gold Street into a greenway that would link Main Street to Bushnell Park.

4. Focusing on Our Immediate Neighborhood

Re-engaging Capital Community College. We have been in conversation with administrators and faculty members at the college about possible collaborations, including providing sanctuary for students who need a respite during the day; pastoral support for students, faculty and staff; and community service opportunities for students, faculty and staff. We are also exploring ways to collaborate with the school's humanities and music departments, including cross-promoting events and engaging in joint endeavors. In addition, we will make rehearsal space available to students, and provide them controlled access to our two organs and many pianos.

Re-engaging the Hartford Stage. We have been in conversation with Hartford Stage's executive director and its associate artistic director about ways in which we can play together. We recognize our many shared values, including a commitment to the City of Hartford and an imperative to create safe spaces in which individuals and communities can grapple with their demons, imagine their better selves, and explore the common good.

We and the Stage are exploring ways in which might utilize one another's spaces. In addition, we have expressed our mutual openness to pursuing joint ventures. For example, the Stage is hard at work modifying some of its productions so that they are inviting to people on the autism spectrum. This requires rethinking of everything from staging to sound design to lighting design to expectations about audience behavior. As it happens, we at the Cathedral have approached organizations that work with the same population to explore ways in which we might be of use to them. As a consequence, the prospects for a three-way

collaboration are quite real.

Speaking of three-way collaborations, both the Cathedral and the Hartford Stage have in conversation with our common neighbor, Capital Community College, about shared interests and common ventures. The trifecta would be to find a way for all three organizations to collaborate. We are just at the beginning of such conversation, but I am hopeful that something wonderful will emerge.

Engaging downtown Hartford. Within the next 12-15 months, nearly a thousand new apartment and condominium units will be online in downtown Hartford. Projections are for even greater increases in the following years. This trend will be bolstered by the planned relocation of the West Hartford campus of the University of Connecticut to a spot just south of the Hartford Public Library. And while there is considerable debate about the merits of building a new minor league baseball stadium just north of the Cathedral, its impact on downtown Hartford is bound to be significant. In the best case scenario, the stadium and the associated housing, retail outlets, and supermarket will help to knit the North End of Hartford to the city's center. At a minimum, the new developments will provide manifold opportunities for the Cathedral to share and be the Good News. In the meantime, we have been actively engaging those who live and work in our neighborhood.

HYPE - Hartford Young Professionals and Entrepreneurs. Most of HYPE's 4,000 members work downtown, and a significant chunk of them live there as well. As you might imagine, much of their focus is on professional and social networking, and we have offered to make our spaces, including our outdoor patio, for HYPE events. In addition, HYPE is involved in downtown Hartford through its Civic Engagement and Community Involvement committees. Plans are underway for HYPE to adopt Church Street Eats as one of the organization's community service opportunities.

Blessing of the Animals in Bushnell Park. On October 4, 2014 we held our first animal blessing in Bushnell Park, on the occasion of St. Francis's feast day. Unfortunately, a steady downpour limited the number of participants. However, neither our enthusiasm nor our spirits were dampened. We see this as a major opportunity to connect with a broad swath of Hartford's citizens and denizens. In addition, the annual Blessing of the Animals offers an easy way to express our

commitment to the City, and to deepen our connections with those who are charged with its care. A clear example of this is the willingness of the Hartford Police Department to allow its Mounted Police Unit to participate in the festivities.

5. Ongoing efforts

Christ Church Cathedral continues to feed and clothe people in need through the **Church Street Eats** program, and to conduct an outdoor worship service in Bushnell Park – **Church by the Pond** -- that is followed by a nourishing meal. Although Church by the Pond is a regular parish worship service, one of four that takes place each weekend, it is also a prime example of the ways in which the Cathedral seeks to engage both the wider church and the City. The celebrants come from across the Diocese, and the “coffee hour” is provided by groups and organizations from many different faith traditions, and from no faith tradition at all. Much the same can be said of Church Street Eats. Although it is essentially parish-based outreach, the volunteers who prepare and serve the food come from all over, and include civic organizations, local businesses, and public and private schools.

The George Beach Home is a 30-unit building near Hartford Hospital that houses women (and a few men) of limited means. Most of the Home’s tenants are physically or mentally disabled. In the late 19th century, George Beach’s last will and testament established a Trust to provide housing for financially-strapped single Episcopal women. Under the terms of the Will, three clerics -- the rector of Hartford’s Trinity Episcopal Church, the rector of West Hartford’s St. John Episcopal Church, and the Dean of Christ Church Cathedral -- were named as trustees. Since that date, the George Beach Home has been in continuous operation in various locations around the City. The Cathedral continues to share management and oversight of the Home with Trinity and St. James, and to provide pastoral support when needed.

ENGAGING THE ARTS

1. Citywide

First Night. The Cathedral used to participate in this citywide New Year’s Eve event, and will do so again on December 31, 2014. In the auditorium, we will host

a performance by a renowned magician (whose day job is as a Baptist pastor). There will also be festivities in the Cathedral itself, as we invite to visitors to experience the inner workings of our pipe organ, as well as other instruments (such as the hurdy gurdy and the gamelan) that will appeal to a wide audience.

Jazz Festival and similar gatherings. For years the Cathedral has participated in Hartford's annual jazz festival by sharing a display booth in Bushnell Park on Saturday and by hosting a jazz mass on Sunday. We are exploring opportunities to connect with other citywide festivals as well, most of which take place in Bushnell Park or along the Connecticut River. This pursuit will be greatly aided by the relationship we have formed with Hartford's office of Marketing, Events & Cultural Affairs.

Winterfest. Each year the iQuilt oversees a citywide festival during the Winter months. The executive director of the Hartford Stage has floated the idea of forming a partnership with the Cathedral to increase the festival's cultural offerings. The Stage already produces special theatrical programming around the holidays. The proposal on the table is that the Cathedral join with Hartford's other downtown churches in presenting a rotating series of concerts.

2. Mainstream

Hartford Stage. See the description, above, under the "Focusing on our immediate neighborhood" heading.

The Bushnell. To date we have not reached out to the Bushnell, but will do so in the next month or two.

Infinity Music Hall & Bistro. This new (to downtown Hartford) venue opened this Summer. We will connect with it in the next month or two.

3. Alternative Arts Scene

Hartford has an exceedingly rich alternative arts scene. Among the many cultural gems are the **Charter Oak Cultural Center** and the **Real Art Ways Cinema and Coffeehouse**. We have ready access to this scene through parishioners (including one of the members of the Cathedral Discernment Task Force), former parishioners, and the sculptors David Borawski and Anne Cubberly who live in an apartment on the third floor of our Cathedral House. We are looking forward to

tapping into and supporting this rich cultural trove.

We have entered into a relationship with The **Unified Theater Company**, an organization that sponsors productions written, staged and performed by young people of varying physical and mental abilities. We have made our auditorium available to the company, and are looking forward to connecting the theater company with Capital Community College in hopes that they might form a partnership.

4. Cathedral-Based

Artists-in-Residence. We are currently blessed with the presence of the Asylum Quartet as an ensemble-in-residence. We are open to the idea of sheltering other artists-in-residence, with a particular focus on individuals or groups that are up and coming.

Evensongs and Concerts. Last month (October), the Cathedral presented a concert in honor of J. S. Bach. Later this month (November), we will offer a requiem concert in honor of those who have fallen in battle. These are the forerunners of a renewed effort to contribute to, and not merely support, Hartford's cultural scene.

Recitals. We will continue efforts to make our auditorium available to local music students for recitals.

ENGAGING THE DIOCESE

Historically, Christ Church Cathedral's role as a gathering place for the Diocese was taken for granted. The annual Diocesan Convention was held at the Cathedral, as were ordinations, and the Cathedral was viewed as the default location for any large gathering. These days the annual Convention is a movable feast, and ordinations to the transitional diaconate and to the priesthood increasingly take place in the ordinand's home parish. These changes have turned a "given" into a "question." In what ways can a Cathedral knit together, serve and support the Episcopal Church in Connecticut?

A significant part of the Diocesan-wide conversation will be given over this question. In the meantime, Christ Church Cathedral continues to serve the whole Diocese in ways that are worth lifting up, and is engaged in exploring new ways to do so that speak to our changing times.

1. Diocesan-wide gatherings.

Although it no longer hosts the annual Convention or most ordinations, Christ Church Cathedral continues to be the site of regularly-scheduled diocesan-wide gatherings including **the ordination of deacons, the renewal of vows on Holy Tuesday, and the triennial 50th Wedding Anniversary Celebration.** In addition, the Cathedral hosts occasional Diocesan gatherings such as the recent **40th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women.**

2. Diocesan-wide collaborations and networks.

Christ Church Cathedral also hosts, on occasion, Diocesan-wide-collaborations such as the annual conference of Faith Behind Bars and Beyond. We understand the support of collaborations and networks to be an important part of our role as a Cathedral, and will be reaching out to as many of them as we can.

3. Opportunities for common mission.

Similarly, we see as part of our distinctive role the creation of opportunities for common mission. This, of course, happens in many parishes, but we assume a particular responsibility for incubating and sharing such efforts. **Church Street Eats** and **Church by the Pond** are exemplars, as is **the Onesimus Project.** Over the course of the next year, we hope to create opportunities for common mission related to juvenile justice and at-risk children.

4. Patronal Feast Days.

We are exploring ways to gather together the Episcopal Church in Connecticut for worship and prayer. One of the most promising ideas is for Christ Church Cathedral to host regularly-scheduled Patronal Feast Days. In essence, all of the churches in the Diocese named after St. John (or James or Paul) would worship together on a Sunday afternoon. The service would be jointly planned by the clergy and lay folk of the various congregations, and the Cathedral would provide liturgical and logistical support. Of course, not all of our congregations are named after patron saints, so we would have to be creative in providing opportunities for them to gather as well. For example, we could gather together churches named after one or more parts of the Trinity.

5. Clergy “church home.”

Historically, Christ Church Cathedral has served as the church home for clergy who are canonically resident in the Diocese of Connecticut. This is in recognition of the fact that clergy are not “members” of the congregations they serve, and often need a place to worship and occasionally celebrate when they are between cures. (The situation is slightly different for deacons who typically retain a home parish and are encouraged to worship there once a month). Similarly, the Cathedral is the place from which all clergy may be if they so wish. Unfortunately, the fact that the Cathedral is a church home for all clergy (and not just the seat of the bishops) is not universally recognized or understood. Over the course of the next several months we intend to get the word out.