

Parish Profile
For
Christ Episcopal Church
October 2021



Our Mission

Christ Church Towanda is a Christian community empowered by the Holy Spirit in unity with Jesus Christ. We are a community that endeavors to share God's gift of love.

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Introduction

Christ Episcopal Church in Towanda, Pennsylvania, is searching for a new rector to lead our congregation to an exciting future. Christ Episcopal Church has produced this Parish Profile, which outlines the proposed future, current status, and history of our congregation.

The vestry appointed a search committee to organize the search process, develop the Parish Profile, screen applications, interview candidates, and recommend a choice to the vestry.

Search Committee Members

Beth Schulze

Hilary Haight

Erin Groves

Kippy Vail

Marguerite Shaner

John Schoonover

Debi Weisbrod

Who Are We?

Christ Church congregation is a small, closely knit parish family who cares deeply for one another, our families, friends, community, country, and our world. We are dedicated to our ministry for Jesus Christ and to the preservation of our historical church building. Moving forward, our goal is to both heal from our past and grow into our future. We seek to share our blessings from and faith in God with people of all ages. Our future goals include: 1. Growth in numbers and in strength 2. Attracting both young and old 3. Providing a rich weekly experience that encompasses spiritual development, Christian education, and music 4. Strong children, youth, and adult programs that encourage new members, retention of current members, and participation in the life of the church 5. Flexibility and creativity so that both traditional and modern elements can be included in our Eucharist Celebrations and other services 6. Community outreach and visibility

The Rector We Seek

Our church family is looking for a part time priest who possesses the capability of being emotionally connected with the congregation and providing pastoral care. We would also like a priest who is enthusiastic and offers inspiration and new ideas. The ability to communicate the Gospel in ways that people find engaging and relevant to our lives is also important. Our congregation is small. We would welcome a priest who can integrate and involve new people into the life of our church. To accomplish this, we want our priest to be involved and visible in the community. With growth, we would hope to increase this part time position to full time.

The Diocese of Bethlehem

The Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem covers 14 counties in Pennsylvania to the north and west of Philadelphia. The current bishop, the Right Reverend Kevin D. Nichols, was elected as Bishop on April 28, 2018, and consecrated on September 15, 2018. The Cathedral is the Cathedral Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, 333 Wyandotte Street, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. There are 59 parishes in the Diocese. The diocese is made up of 8 Convocations. Convocation & Assembly is a new model just being birthed, there is to be a Northern and Southern Canon Missioner. Convocation & Assembly are grouped by region and proximity to one another with the hope of extending diocesan leadership, lay and clergy, through partnerships and shared resources renewal of community and exchange of ideas and interaction with all parishes.

Our Community

Towanda is a borough and the county seat of Bradford County. Towanda is located in the heart of the Endless Mountains on the west bank of the Susquehanna River. This area is a mix of small towns with panoramic views and scenic beauty. U.S. Route 6 passes through the center of the borough, leading 39 miles to Tunkhannock and 60 miles to Scranton and west 37 miles to Mansfield. U.S. Route 220 bypasses the borough to the west and leads north 18 miles to its terminus at Waverly, New York and southwest 67 miles to Williamsport. Towanda is best known for hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, and other outdoor recreation, with strong agricultural roots. There are three industrial plants located here: Global Tungsten and Powders Corp., E.I. DuPont De Nemours, and Jeld-Wen. Towanda offers a community hospital, various and interesting small businesses, Towanda Golf Club, Lackawanna Community College, Towanda Campus, and an active YMCA .

Our Congregation

Christ Church is a congregation who has been without an active rector for a year; this coupled with COVID has proven to be a challenge. We are small in number but large in spirit and determination. The situation which resulted in the retirement of our former rector has been felt with a great sense of loss, hurt and struggle. We are trying to understand what happened, knowing we will never have the whole picture due to confidentiality regarding personal issues. We have pulled together and grown so much closer in community, love, and charity. The words “God works in strange and mysterious ways” echo throughout this time of transition. We are working to heal and move forward. We are financially sound, and all members have a strong resolution to continue to prosper and grow.

Christ Church History

Christ Church had its origin in 1833 when the Rev. Samuel T. Lord of Athens began holding services in Towanda once every four weeks. For a number of years, services were held in the old Court House.

On December 20, 1841, the Court of Common Pleas of Bradford County granted a charter to “Christ’s Church”, Towanda, in the name of seven active laymen-- William B. Foster, Jr., O.D. Bartlett, Abraham Goodwin, Dr. John N. Weston, C.L. Ward, M.C. Mercur, and David Wilmot.

In spite of a severe financial depression, work was begun on the erection of a church building on land given by Hiram Mix. Completed in 1842, it was a Gothic style wooden frame building, measuring 36 x 50 feet, and stood just north of what is now our present church; an organ was also purchased. The Rev. George Watson was named the first Rector, and Christ Church was consecrated on June 14, 1842, by Bishop H. W. Onderdock. It was admitted into union with the Convention in 1844. Including Rev. Watson, there have been 31 Rectors leading our congregation through 2020.

By 1847, the church had become self-supporting. The Rev. Robert J. Parvin, the third Rector, reported to the Convention in 1849, “Our parish is in an improving condition. Through the exertions of the Ladies of the Sewing Circle of our congregation, we have just procured an excellent bell, the want of it has long been felt.”

Movement for the building of a larger church was started in 1866. Land was donated by Ulysses Mercur and B.S. Russell, \$15,900 subscribed by the congregation, plans supplied by E. T. Potter, Esq., Architect of New York, and the foundations were laid for the new building the following year.

The laying of the cornerstone for the new church took place on September 19, 1868. After the articles had been placed in the stone and the cover placed upon it, the Bishop, The Rt. Rev. W.

B. Stevens, struck the stone three times with a mason's mallet, and said, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen. I lay the cornerstone of an edifice to be erected by the name of Christ Church, and to be devoted to the service of Almighty God, agreeable to the principles of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, in its doctrines, ministry, liturgy, rites and usages. Other foundations can no man lay than which is laid, even Jesus Christ; who is God over all, blessed for evermore, and in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Amen." Due to financial difficulties of many members of the congregation, building operations were suspended and the completed foundations stood choked with weeds for twenty years.

The current Christ Episcopal Church was built in 1889 with conglomerate stone from Barclay Mountain (just a few miles south of Towanda). The Bradford County Court house is built of the same stone. The walls of the church are three feet thick! It was also built with a Gothic architectural design.

All the windows in the sanctuary are stained-glass; the different colors and designs of each one portrays a story. Windows were given by people in memory of someone, usually a family member. The large "Mercur" window was given in memory of a chief justice of the state of Pennsylvania. It was built in England and shipped to the United States at the time the church was built. The total cost of the church when it was built in 1889 was \$75,000. The restoration of the Mercur window in the 1990s was done at a cost of over \$100,000.

The outside doors of the church are very large and heavy. They are painted red on the outside as most Episcopal church doors are. The door latch is an iron bar one foot long and 1 1/2 inches wide, with a "tongue" which can be dropped down onto the bar to lock it and raised up to unlock it.

The church can seat at least 425 people. You may notice the brass plaques inscribed with names on some pews. Throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, it was a common practice for individuals and families to "rent" pews. This served as a principal means of raising income.

Originally lighted by gas candles, each of the six main support columns in the nave is surrounded by twelve lights. The original gas lights that surround those columns went unused until they were updated to electric lights in May of 2010.

The pipe organ was built by the William Johnson and Son, Co., and installed in the church in 1893, four years after the church was built. At first the power for it to be played came from a boy who was paid 10 cents for a Sunday service to work the bellows; later, water was used to furnish the power. The water came from a creek named Mix Run which was just north of the church. The creek really is in the church yard and was covered over many years ago, but still runs there underground. Eventually, an electric motor was put into use. The organ is not an

electric organ, but a motor, placed in the downstairs, provides the air to the pipes. It is called a “reverse tracker” organ because it does not face the pipes as most tracker organs do. Because of this, it takes much more strength, energy, and skill to play it! The organ is well maintained and used for all the church services in the nave.

Our Building Today

Christ Church is a well-maintained facility. Over the last several years we have undertaken some extensive projects. The roof has been completely replaced, the steeple floor and bell cradle repaired, and standing seam copper was installed over the Main Street turret. In addition, the vinyl siding between the roofs was replaced with onsite fabricated aluminum siding. New flooring was installed in the Sunday School rooms and the hallways downstairs. Lighting is in the process of being updated with LED replacing both incandescent bulbs and old fluorescent tubes. A security system has been installed as well as motion sensitive lighting for the exterior of the Parish Hall. Handicapped parking spaces and a ramp have been added to the north entrance, and the ramp leading into the Parish Hall was updated. We are in the process of refurbishing all the stained-glass windows throughout the building. The organ is regularly maintained. After the plaster ceiling fell onto some of the pipes, they were cleaned and repaired, and a new wooden ceiling was placed above them. The wind reservoir for the organ has numerous leaks, but we hope to have it repaired in the first quarter of 2022. Due to flooding, the steam boiler was replaced and is now covered under an annual maintenance agreement. When Covid necessitated having virtual services, it became obvious that our internet connectivity needed to be updated. We now have internet service both upstairs and down.

Moving into the 21st Century

We feel blessed that our forbearers provided and preserved this beautiful building for us as they passed down their faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is our mission to continue this ministry of sharing God’s gift of love.

Our Ministry Today

Worship

Our worship service is of the liturgical tradition. All services include the Celebration of Holy Eucharist. Our worship services include Sunday at 10:00am Holy Eucharist with music, followed by coffee hour/fellowship in the parish hall, Tuesday 8:00am Chapel mass followed by breakfast at a local restaurant**, and Wednesday 6:00pm Bible study with Holy Communion.** The laity plays an active role in worship. Both children and adults are encouraged to serve in

the various lay ministry roles including Altar Guild, lay reading, chalice bearing, torch bearing and crucifer. We are also blessed to have an active women's group known as “The Wonder Group.”

**These services have been canceled due to Covid-19, but we are in hopes of resuming as soon as possible!

Ministry Today

Christ Church parish family is a loving, welcoming congregation. We strive to be committed to God in prayer, worship, partaking of the Holy Eucharist, studying scripture, and sharing God’s love. His Holy Word and our communion with Him bring us His joy and compassion. This enables us, through our own lives, to bring encouragement, support, and love to one another, the community, our diocese, and people everywhere. We support many organizations by providing space where they can meet and strengthen their cause. This includes community groups: Girl Scouts, Towanda Musical Society, D.A.R., Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Children and Youth Services, and Towanda Garden Club.

We provide office space to Grace Connection, a ministry of local churches serving the Towanda, Northeast Bradford, and Wyalusing School Districts of Bradford County in Pennsylvania, that seeks to lovingly aid people over the hardships of life by connecting with them in the name of Jesus Christ to help provide assistance when and where other agencies are not available.

We maintain a Church Food Pantry to support those in need of basic food and hygiene items. Our church group “The Kitchen Angels” comes together to provide meals and support to our parishioners who are ill and homebound, or meals in the event of a death in the family.

Parish Life

Each year there are a number of special activities which in the past have included: Special Christmas Services, Weekly Lenten Services, Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper, Special Easter Services, Italian Dinner, Annual Chicken BBQ, Fall Harvest Dinner, ~~and~~ Attic Treasures rummage and bake sale, and the Annual Parish Christmas Party.

While Covid-19 has presented many challenges to all of us, we remain committed – to God, to our church family, to our community, and to the world. We pray for strength – Father, Son and Holy Spirit to us.

Resources

Staff

Christ Episcopal Church staff is currently led by our Transitional Deacon in Charge and Vocational Deacon. We also have a part-time secretary and a part-time Sexton.

Vestry

Our vestry has 9 members, serving three-year terms with a third of the members elected every year. The nominating committee each year is made up of those whose terms are ending, and a slate is presented at the Annual Congregational Meeting in January; and all members vote for the new members. The vestry meets once per month and the treasurer is present at all regular meetings but is not a voting member of the vestry.

Facilities

The Christ Church building is a fine example of Gothic architecture. It is built of native white conglomerate stone quarried on Stone Mountain, Bradford County. The outside dimensions are 127x50. From the base to the top of the cross on the spire is 150 feet.

The rose window represents Christ the King on the Throne of Judgment, and the three lancets are Moses with the tablets of the Law, St. Michael expelling Lucifer, and Solomon carrying his Temple in his hands. This window was donated to our church in loving memory of Ulysses Mercur, a Chief Justice of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It was made in England by Cox and Sons and was shipped to the church when construction was completed in 1889.

Our pipe organ was installed in the church in 1893. It is one of a limited number of Johnson & Son tracker organs existing in the country today. It is called a “reverse Tracker” organ because it does not face the pipes as most tracker organs do. Because of this, it takes much more strength, energy, and skill to play it. The organ is in good condition and used for the church services.

The Nativity Chapel has a columbarium where the ashes of deceased parishioners have been interred..

Financial summary

The following table summarizes income and expenses over the part 5-year period:

Year	Operating income	Operating expense	Net	Percent	Capital expenditures
2020	\$118,778	\$122,486	-\$3,708	-3.12%	\$81,364
2019	\$138,407	\$131,697	\$6,710	4.85%	\$8,111
2018	\$138,910	\$132,171	\$6,739	4.85%	\$34,455
2017	\$137,016	\$126,040	\$10,976	8.01%	\$17,663
2016	\$130,698	\$126,411	\$4,287	3.28%	\$3,891

Basic church operating expenses, excluding the salary and benefits for the rector, are covered by income generated from endowments, trusts, and rental of the rectory. These expenses increase a few percentage points annually and are closely monitored and controlled.

Generous donations have funded all the capital improvements which, over the past 10 years, include organ and furnace improvements, a new roof, interior painting, and a long-term plan (currently being executed) to refurbish the many beautiful stained-glass windows.

This leaves annual donations (pledge income) to fund the salary and benefits for the rector. Pre-covid, this income was sufficient to cover a full-time rector, albeit at low salary levels.

Unfortunately, however, there have been two significant negative developments which have greatly impacted annual giving. The first is an aging congregation with deaths and relocations to assisted living facilities. The second was the Diocese of Bethlehem's leadership bodies, the Standing Committee and Diocesan Council, called upon congregations to suspend indoor worship. We followed this request and it led to some of our members going elsewhere for worship.

As a result, projected pledge income for 2022 is down 40% from 2019 to an estimated \$45,000. This leaves us able to afford only a part ($\approx \frac{1}{2}$) time rector with minimal to no health insurance requirements.

Christ Church Nativity Chapel

