

## St. Paul's Cathedral, Buffalo

### What are some significant moments in the history of your church that have shaped its identity today?

St. Paul's was the first Episcopal church in the village of Buffalo, having been founded in 1817. The original wooden church was in use until 1850 when the building was sold to another congregation and was moved to another location. By that time the congregation of St. Paul's had engaged the renowned architect Richard Upjohn to design and build a new church of Medina sandstone. The new church, which Upjohn considered his best work, in spite of the fact that he was the architect for the iconic Trinity Church on Wall Street in New York. The new church was opened in 1851. On Ascension Day in 1888, a huge natural gas explosion destroyed the entire interior, leaving only the walls and spire standing. That very evening after the flames of the conflagration were extinguished, the vestry met and made the decision to rebuild the church in the same location. We are still here on the same plot of land in the center of the city 208 years later.



### What makes your church unique in the region and the diocese?

Two things make St. Paul's unique. In the late 19th century St. Paul's was designated the cathedral church for the recently formed Diocese of Western New York. Within walking distance of the cathedral are the Buffalo City Hall, Erie County Hall, the Walter J. Mahoney NY State Office Building, and the U.S. Federal Courthouse. A close proximity to the centers of political power, enables us to have meaningful dialog with civic leaders about the issues facing many our neighbors, namely the homeless and working poor who come to us for assistance in the Flickinger Ministry Center. On March 12, 1874, St. Paul's was the site of President Fillmore's funeral. It is the only church in Buffalo that is a National Historic Landmark.

### What are the most vibrant ministries or strengths of your parish today?

The most important ministries of the cathedral revolve around feeding and clothing the homeless, many of whom actually live in Cathedral Park or nearby. Our Garden of Love ministry provides a bagged lunch and free clothing on Tuesday mornings in the Ministry Center. Recently we have been joined in this endeavor by 5 other parishes from the diocese who take turns providing some elements of our lunches. Also, this year we have opened up the Ministry Center on Monday and Wednesday to Feed 716, an extension of Buffalo's Friends of Night People, which provides lunch on those

morning. Feed 716 has recently expressed an interest in expanding their efforts to include Friday. On Thursday mornings, Cathedral Cares, an initiative begun last year by our seminarian, starts with CANA Art Studio open to all; at noon, a special Eucharist geared towards the homeless is celebrated in Cathedral Park followed by distribution of meal kits and other nourishment to a growing number of those who need it most.



**Describe a moment in your community's life when you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit moving among you. What made that moment possible?**

Early in May of this year, we were contacted by the Secretary of the Western NY Coalition for the Homeless regarding the Buffalo Code Blue Initiative. Code Blue shelters typically operate during the winter months, but they received the news that they were receiving funding and authorization to run as year-round shelter. At the same time their lease had expired at the building they were currently occupying. They needed a space to temporarily house about 65 of the most vulnerable and least mobile of those who were currently using the shelter. Would St. Paul's be able to help? After some calls to the wardens and vestry, Dean Rebecca Barnes, offered the use of our undercroft as a temporary home for the shelter. With a little adjustment to our scheduling the 5-week period while the shelter was in operation at the Cathedral went very smoothly. It did so because the dean, vestry and congregation willingly accepted the Gospel mandate of our Lord to help the least of his flock. This was all possible with a little nudge from the Spirit.

**How does your church engage with the local neighborhood, the civic life of your community, or diocesan and/or Episcopal Church-wide initiatives?**

Because we are a church located in the heart of the city, engaging with our neighbors is almost inevitable since some of them live in Cathedral Park or in Firemen's Park across Main Street. We welcome them to worship with us and to join us for coffee hour. Our feeding ministries operate 4 days a week. Another active group of the parish is our Social Justice Action Team or SJAT for short. Over the past two years, in addition to some other initiatives, the SJAT has partnered with the Church of the Good Shepherd in Irving, NY. In addition to a grant to Good Shepherd from the cathedral vestry, the team has aided Good Shepherd to receive grant monies to facilitate some much-needed projects at the church. Some essential repairs were made to the church and parish hall and the parish was able to identify and mark the graves of past members who were buried around the church itself. SJAT looks forward to continuing the partnership going forward.

**What are the hopes and dreams of your congregation for its next chapter?**

Like most congregations one of our longtime aspirations has been and will continue to be growing our membership and continuing and enhancing our various ministries. Our Music ministry will get a boost as we embark on a several years project of re-building our pipe organ and searching for a new Organist/Choirmaster. We hope to be able to use some of the unused space in the Flickinger Ministry Center to expand our outreach to our homeless neighbors. With God's help we hope that St. Paul's will continue to preach the Gospel, be a place of spiritual formation and connection, and witness to God's love here in the heart of Buffalo for generations to come.