

Calvary, Williamsville

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

The origins of Calvary Episcopal Church date back to 1819, when residents of the town of Williams Mills began holding services in their homes. About a century later, property was donated for a parish hall, and a small church was dedicated in 1924. When the congregation outgrew this building, parishioner and former Williamsville mayor Daniel Niederlander donated land in 1951 to build Calvary's present church.

Since 1959, Calvary benefitted from generous and talented parishioners who provided the carillon, a pipe organ, an antiphonal organ, wood carvings and statues, and 25 stained glass windows—all of which enhance the beauty of worship. The campus expanded in 1968 to include the Scaife Building, which adjoins the church and houses Hughson Hall, a large community hall in which fellowship has thrived over the years with musicals, dinners, dances, speaker forums, and celebrations of life.

The 27-year rectorship of Fr. Edward H. Kryder shaped Calvary's identity by advocating for civil rights, racial integration in education, ordination of women, outreach initiatives, women in the vestry, the revised prayer book and hymnal, and greater lay participation in worship services.

Decades later, the abrupt departures of two rectors and an interim rector within an eight-year period brought turmoil and instability. Guided by our second interim rector, Calvary began the soul-searching and healing work of identifying our priorities, recommitting ourselves to Calvary's mission and ministry, and improving our accountability. To move forward and unify our parish family, we have worked to focus on our commonalities and respect our differences.

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

Calvary Church is a lively place where people seek to make the love of God tangible through spirituality, community, and outreach. Jesus' central message of compassion, justice, and respect for all people provides a foundation for all that Calvary undertakes. We are called to reach across all divides and to challenge one another and the institutional church to live out Christ's message.

Our Common Ground lecture series was started in 2016 to invite speakers and panels to foster understanding about topics where parishioners and the public may share common interests. Past topics include The State of Mental Wellness in Western New York, Therapy Dogs, Jerry Zremski's Buffalo News series on refugees, Dr. Christopher Kerr (CEO of Hospice Buffalo)'s book *Death is But a Dream*, and most recently Salva Dut's experiences as a Lost Boy of Sudan and his organization, Water for South



Sudan.

In 1965, Corner House Nursery school opened as the region's first successful racially integrated preschool. Currently, Calvary is one of the locations for Pixie Village Preschool, the Universal PreK for the Williamsville School District.

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

In 2023, Calvary's vestry identified "Four Pillars" that Calvary aspires to prioritize: Worship, Music, Children, and Helping Others.

Worship: Calvary offers 4 Eucharists weekly: Saturdays at 4 pm, Sundays at 8 am and 10 am (which is live-streamed), and Wednesdays at 7 am.

Music: Calvary's choir has the distinction of performing with the Rolling Stones at a concert in 2015. Since 2024, renowned composer and musician Roland Martin has directed the church's music program and 24 choir members. The choir sings at the 10 am Sunday service, holiday services, and the Great Music at Calvary Series of evensongs and concerts, which have featured collaborations with groups such as Holy Trinity Lutheran Choir and The Buffalo Chamber Players. Since 2013, Calvary's Choral Scholars program has offered small scholarships to high schools students in the Buffalo area.

Children: Calvary's Sunday School program aims to build faith and character which will serve our youth for life. On the last Sunday of the month, children and youth are encouraged to participate as lectors, ushers, and crucifiers at our 10 am service.

Helping Others encompasses both the Outreach and Pastoral Care Ministries.

Calvary's Outreach ministry provides ongoing aid to local organizations and funds crises response efforts as they arise. Every month, volunteers deliver clothing and serve dinner at Friends of Night People. For decades, Calvary has supported Buffalo School 30 with volunteers, collection drives, and the Mitten Tree project, which provides a student-chosen book and a fleece jacket for each student in the second and fourth grades. Calvary's refugee ministry has done collection drives, home furnishings, and resettlement support for Journey' End Refugee Services and Jewish Family Services. More recently, Calvary provided below-market rental housing for a Ukrainian refugee family while helping to settle a Karen refugee family. In the coming year, we plan to sponsor a student at the Our Little Roses Mission in Honduras. Calvary's Pastoral Care Ministries serves others in many ways: honoring prayer requests, sending cards and flowers to parishioners, taking Holy Communion to and running errands for the homebound, and sending care packages to college students. Our knitting and crocheting group, Hands 2 Hearts, makes prayer shawls, baby blankets, worry dolls, and dozens of hat/mitten/scarf-sets for Journey's End and Friends of Night People. The Pet Ministry hosts two annual events, the Blessing of the Animals in October and the Pet Memorial Service in May, and it collects donations for pet rescue organizations and pet food pantries. Bakers and volunteers of Calvary's Funeral Reception Ministry provide grieving families with the opportunity to gather together to mourn. Calvary's grief support group, Good Grief, is open to non-parishioners and has served as a model for similar groups in other parishes. Fellowship events and Coffee Hours meet the needs of many in our parish to socialize and connect with others.

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?

Worshiping together in a welcoming and sacred space, the congregation experiences the Holy Spirit as a balm through glorious music, a beautiful homily and/or eulogy, or a candlelight service. Members of groups such as Good Grief and Mother's Prayers report that they often feel the Spirit moving among themselves as they pray together and share stories. Calvary volunteers feel the Spirit's energy as they refurbish refugee housing, distribute gifts at School 30, or pray over recipients of ashes during Ashes to Go.

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

As a member of the Williamsville Business Association (WBA), Calvary has participated in the Annual Soup Stroll contest and the Williamsville Garden Walk, providing art tours of the church. Community members have been enjoying Calvary's Summer Carillon Concert Series for nearly 50 years. They also bring their pets to be blessed at the Blessing of the Animals and shop at Calvary's Garage Sale. Last spring, over 300 people attended Calvary's Common Ground event featuring Salva Dut, whose story as told in Linda Sue Park's book *A Long Walk to Water*, has been read by school children everywhere. Calvary's Ashes to Go drive-up program began in 2016 distributing ashes a few hours in the morning to 56 people. It has continued to grow with demand so that in 2025, Calvary clergy and lay people distributed ashes for twelve hours to 1111 people. Calvary has also engaged in a racial healing circle with members of St. Philip's Church, collaborated on tours to the Underground Railroad Heritage Center with other parishes, and helped to host an Our Little Roses Luncheon for the Church of the Advent.

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

At a recent meeting, each vestry member filled in a response to the prompt, "In the next 3 to 5 years, I want Calvary to have ____." Many of the responses were pragmatic. We addressed the need for adequate staffing: having a sexton/building manager and more help for our parish manager and our rector. We plan to upgrade the sound system on the altar and the Wi-Fi for Hughson Hall, get a remote door opener in our lobby, and provide more handicapped-accessible parking spaces. As stewards of Calvary, we hope to strike a balance between fiscal responsibility and increasing the endowment on the one hand with the responsibility to budget for personnel costs, repair our carillon, remodel our basement, and plan for long-term property management costs. Other hopes centered on our congregation. Focussing on current members, we hope to inspire more active involvement in our committees and to prepare for new leadership. We acknowledge a need to grow our congregation by welcoming young families and reestablishing a youth ministry. In asking ourselves, "what do our current and new members need from our church?" we hope to improve our follow-up protocol with visitors to welcome them and find out their needs. We dream of starting new affinity groups that, like our Mother's Prayers and Good Grief groups, serve the needs of people at different stages of life. Other dreams include starting a youth bell choir and creating a local and global medical mission ministry, complete with its own plane.