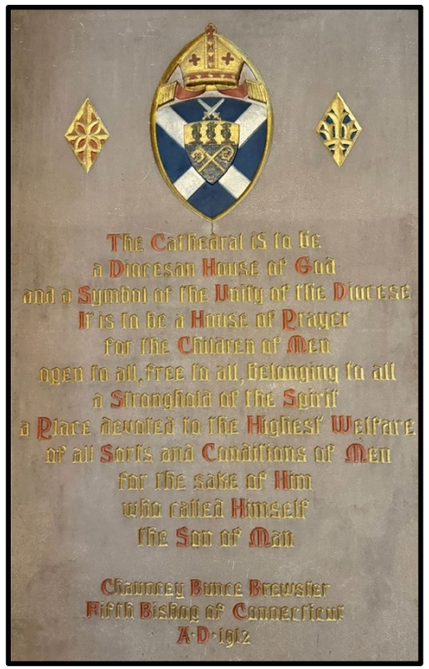


The Cathedral is to be
a Diocesan House of God
and a Symbol of the Unity of the Diocese
It is to be a House of Prayer
for the Children of Men
open to all, free to all, belonging to all
a Stronghold of the Spirit
a Place devoted to the Highest Welfare
of all Sorts and Conditions of Men
for the sake of Him
who called Himself
the Son of Man

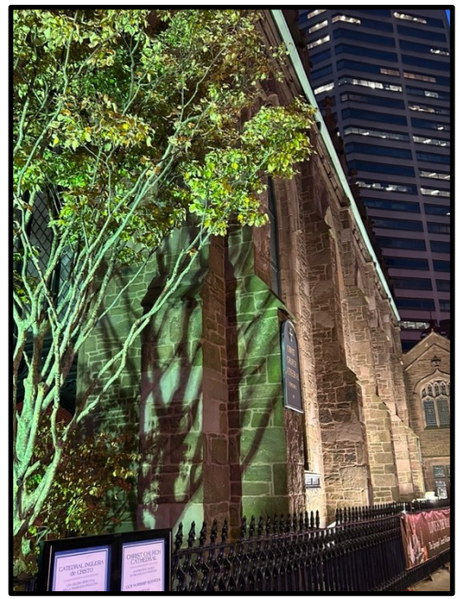
Chauncey Bunce Brewster
Fifth Bishop of Connecticut
A•D•1912

A Short History and Tour of Christ Church Cathedral Hartford CT 2026

In 1912, Chauncey Bunce Brewster, fifth Episcopal Bishop of Connecticut, proposed designating a large urban parish to serve as a cathedral for the Diocese. He hoped a Cathedral would draw the parishes across the Diocese into closer unity. His idea was accepted as was his choice of parish – Christ Church, Hartford. By 1919, the plans were completed and on Easter Monday of that year, Christ Church accepted the Diocese's invitation and was renamed Christ Church Cathedral.

In 1762, the Episcopal Brethren of Hartford paid £80 for land on the west side of Main Street, north of what is now Church Street. After laying a stone foundation in 1762, a lack of funds, and, moreover, the American Revolution prevented raising the frame of the first Christ Church until 1792. Completed in In1795, the church was built in one of the prevailing styles of the day – a white clapboard meeting house.

It being the sole Episcopal church in Hartford, a growing congregation soon filled the small church to overflowing. By 1823, the Rev. Nathaniel S. Wheaton, Rector of Christ Church, and the Vestry realized the parish would soon need a larger building in which to worship. Taking advantage of a 14-month trip to England soliciting donations of books for the newly established Washington (now Trinity) College, Rev. Wheaton spent much of his time sketching the architectural details of many churches, including Westminster Abbey and York Minster.



Christ Church engaged Ithiel Town of New Haven as architect in early 1827. Town incorporated many details from Rev. Wheaton's sketches in his plans. Christ Church became one of the first Gothic style churches in the United States. After the congregation purchased the land on the southern corner of Main and Church Streets, the builders broke ground in the summer of 1827, completing the foundation by autumn. In May 1828, the cornerstone was laid, and the roof was in place before the following winter. Christ Church was consecrated on December 23, 1829.

"We build this temple to gather souls into the fold of Christ, through the ministry and ordinances of the gospel."

The Interior

When it was built, Christ Church measured 100 feet long by 70 feet wide. In 1879, the Chancel was Recessed, adding 16 feet to the length. This addition is marked by the molded arch. Ohio stone was set in place in rough block, and the moldings cut after it was in position. The roof inside the arch is oak made in the form of a barrel vault with molded ribs and elaborately carved bosses where the ribs intersect.

In 1924, shields were painted on the arch. Beginning at the top, represented are (l. to r.): [row 1] Jesus; [row 2] St.Mary, St. John the Evangelist; [row3] St. Andrew, John the Baptist, St. Peter, St. James Major; [row 4] St. Matthew, St. Philip, St. Thomas, St. Simon; [row 5] St. Matthias, St. James the Less, St. Jude, St. Bartholomew. The arch's side walls are highlighted by paintings on canvas – on the left, *Christ Healing the Blind* and *Christ Blessing the Little Children* on the right. Painted by Heaton, Butler & Bayne of London, they have hung here since 1886.

The Bishop's Cathedra

On the right side of the Chancel is the Bishop's Throne or Cathedra. Beneath the wooden canopy, the Diocese of Connecticut's seal is displayed: the key and the crozier represent Bishop Seabury's seal; the swords denote the See of London; and the grapevines symbolize Hartford, Wethersfield and Windsor – the earliest settlements in Connecticut. To the right and left of the Cathedra are the Canons' Stalls.

The Dean's Stall

Opposite on the left side of the Chancel, are the Dean's Stall and the chair reserved for Suffragan/Assistant Bishops.

The left chair features a carving of the church shield supported by a hart for the city of Hartford and a falcon (falconry was a hobby of the Suffragan Bishop at the time.). The right chair displays the shield of St. Andrew supported by a Christmas rose, and a thistle supported by two Jerusalem crosses.

A wooden screen divides the Chancel from the Chapel. The niches hold the carved figures of (l.to r.), Jubal, father of the organ and the harp; St. Gregory, who developed plainsong; St. Ambrose, founder of church music; and St. Cecilia, patroness of music.

The Organ

The original Christ Church owned the first organ in Hartford and in this part of Connecticut. Until the 20th Century, the organ was situated in the Rear Gallery (then called the Orchestra), along with the choir. Now located on the right side of the Chancel, the present organ was dedicated in 1965. Built by the Austin Organ Company of Hartford, it is an Opus 2417 comprised of 54 stops, 56 ranks and over 3,000 pipes. The pipes range in size from 16 feet to no larger than a pencil. A three-manual console, next to the Nativity Chapel, controls the organ.

"We build this temple in Faith. We have the divine assurance that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church."

The Pulpit and the Lectern

Located at the front of the Chancel, the pulpit features carved grapevines, a symbol of both the Cathedral and Connecticut. The brass eagle lectern – symbolic of St. John carrying the Word throughout the world – was made by John Harman & Company of Birmingham, England. It was added to the church in 1879.

The High Altar

The High Altar was inspired by a tomb in Canterbury Cathedral.

The front panels are carved with symbols of the four writers of the Gospel (l. to r.): the winged man for Matthew, the winged lion for Mark, the winged ox for Luke, and the eagle for John. The center panel features Christ's cross surrounded by *fleur-de-lis.*

The Chapel of the Nativity.

Replacing the Chapel built in 1879 (now the Choir Room), the Chapel of the Nativity dates from 1907. The walls are painted blue and stenciled with *fleur-de-lis,* the symbol of the Virgin Mary. Overhead, the dark blue ceiling is painted with stars, a reminder of the sky over Bethlehem the first Christmas. The floor is red Mercer tile. The carved wood screen behind the altar has four figures: Samuel Seabury, first bishop of the Episcopal Church, holding a miniature of the Cathedral; the Virgin Mary; Saint John; and Saint Augustine, first Archbishop of Canterbury. Three painted panels depict The Annunciation, The Crucifixion, and The Nativity. The theme 'Faith, Hope, and Charity' is depicted in the stained glass window on the west wall as well as in the painted tile mosaic portraying Dorcas giving clothing to the poor (Acts 9:36-42). The banner of the Virgin Mary and Jesus was a gift from the Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney in Scotland, where Bishop Seabury was consecrated in 1784.

The Choir Room

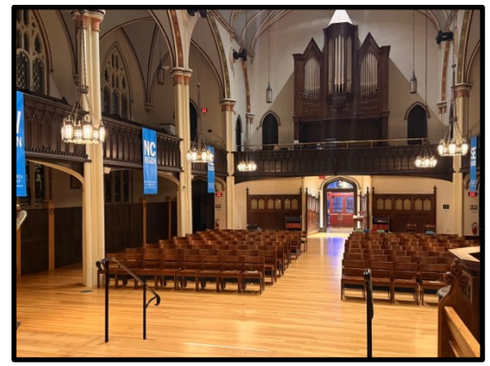
The space designated as Choir Room was originally a chapel built in 1879.

Cathedral Redevelopment 2014 – 2021

In 2014, Ian T. Douglas, PhD, the 15th Episcopal Bishop of Connecticut, initiated a Cathedral discernment process that was led by The Rev. Canon Harlon Dalton, Priest-in-Charge, and a Task Force drawn from across the Diocese. This discernment concluded with a robust report that contained several recommendations, including that the Cathedral's nave be reconfigured with flexible seating in order to accommodate multiple uses and multiple styles of worship. This led to a Cathedral Capital Campaign and Redevelopment Drive.

The implementation of the redevelopment was led by the Very Rev. Miguelina Howell, 10th Dean of the Cathedral, and Bishop Douglas in collaboration with Architect Duo Dickinson. The Cathedral Congregation and Cathedral Chapter played an active role in this renewal of Cathedral's space.

The Redevelopment process engaged community partners and accommodated the needs of various civic groups. The pews were replaced with chairs. The tile slate floor was replaced with oak. The pulpit and lectern are now movable to accommodate performances and other events. The narthex screens and the doors that used to enclose the pews have been preserved and incorporated into the new design.



Present use:

The Cathedral is used by many community partners, hosts a wide variety of performances and exhibits, and is home to many Diocesan events, including Ordinations and the Renewal of Clergy Vows.

The Seating of the 16th Bishop Diocesan, the Rt. Rev. Jeffrey W. Mello, took place at the Cathedral on October 16th, 2022.