

Report to Convention 2025
The Rev. Jennifer Gregg,
Missioner for Servant Leadership

Cathedral of the Beloved

As Cathedral moved into its tenth year, it was marked by significant transitions. As 2024 concluded, we said good-bye and gave thanks for the ministry and presence of our associate pastor, The Rev. Jennifer Livermore. We also gave thanks for the ministry of two long-term members of our executive team. We are grateful to each of them and for all the ways they helped to cultivate the mission and ministry of Cathedral of the Beloved.

As staff and our council gathered for our annual retreat, while several themes of focus became clear, one has remained our focus, that is “visibility.” Visibility has come in different forms: increased and regular communication through social media, an updated and reformatted newsletter, and a marked visibility within several community efforts, most notably through opposing two proposed ordinances within the city of Pittsfield. The first, an attempt to ban panhandling and the second to ban camping in any place downtown.

Pittsfield Ordinances:

While the opposition to pan-handling eventually led to this ordinance being set aside indefinitely, the work around the camping ban continues. At the most recent City Council meeting, the ordinance was redirected to the Board of Health.

The Rev. Margot Page, deacon at Cathedral of the Beloved and All Saints, North Adams, recently wrote this about Cathedral’s participation:

“Cathedral of the Beloved has been represented at the organizations who have been supporting a reshaping of the City Ordinance to Ban Camping in Pittsfield. Homes not Handcuffs is one of these which is effectively a compilation of representatives from several social justice groups including Roots and Dreams and Mustard Seeds, BIO, Wildflower, Berkshire Stonewall Community Coalition, COTB and Project New Growth. Over the past few weeks Housing not Handcuffs has organized and hosted three forums to offer alternatives to the members of City Council to consider instead of criminalizing the homeless and unsheltered poor, taken the lead on organizing cleanup crews to pick up rubbish and debris from the downtown streets, which begin with healthy meals and social engagement and have arranged several sit down, agenda driven meetings with Mayor Marchetti.

The emphasis of Cathedral of the Beloved and the work of Homes not Handcuffs is on listening to what our community is saying and working toward solutions that will bring dignity and equality to those who often experience being marginalized and ignored.”

I (Jenny), and the Cathedral staff, alongside other community leaders, have worked to pave a way between downtown businesses who have struggled with various community members' behaviors and these ordinances. In a letter to the Cathedral and downtown community, I wrote this,

"The downtown we long for is a place of dignity, for those experiencing homelessness, for business owners, for my children and yours ... built for everybody. We, at Cathedral of the Beloved, have something incredibly important to contribute to this work. At Cathedral, our tables are not only the place where we break bread together... These tables are our bridge from isolation into community, the place where misconceptions become compassion and greater understanding. At our tables we change from "us and them" to "we."

A Partnership with The First: Housing Resource Center at Zion Lutheran, Pittsfield

Alongside this effort, Cathedral's Community Care Coordinator, Becky Crane and I, have taken part in the conversations that will help shape The First, a housing resource center. Seen as leaders in ministry with and alongside the most vulnerable in our community, Cathedral of the Beloved was invited to conceptualize The First, along with staff from Hearthway, ServiceNet, and the pastor of Zion Lutheran church. We contributed language for the vision statement, using the very best of what we have learned over the years:

A Piece of The First's Vision reads:

"We are pilgrims on a journey. We are travelers on the road. We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load." -lyrics from hymn, Servant Song

Amidst transition and upheaval due to housing instability, the housing resource center seeks to be a safe space to provide for physical well-being. It is also a place where hearts can find a home, a place to exhale and rest, as all participants come to understand and see their inherent goodness and worth. Through practices of deep listening/presence, compassion and service, the dignity of every human being is respected and honored, welcoming each person just as they are."

The First will be based on a living room model of presence and hospitality. Because receiving state and federal funding typically requires the gathering of demographic data and statistics, fundraisers have focused on individual and local business donations to fund operations.

This fall Becky and I are preaching at Zion Lutheran to continue to build our relationship with Zion Lutheran and to help prepare them for the opening of the First and the 9 affordable housing units being built in their former Sunday School wing. Once construction is fully complete and the resource center opens, we look forward to working with Zion to create contemplative spaces that will provide places of rest, healing and renewal, and resuming our regular mid-week Eucharistic service that was paused due to building construction. We

also intend to be present at the first on a regular basis, to build relationships with community members and accompany and support them, as needed.

Sunday Worship

Worship with a shared meal continued to be offered each week on the lawn. During the winter months, we moved into First Methodist (FUMC) dining room. The temporary shelter is housed at FUMC and operated by ServiceNet. We have built a relationship with ServiceNet. Shelter residents continue to join us during the winter months, and the move indoors provides warmth and hospitality when many places are not open on Sundays. Attendance continues to average around 65. In warmer weather, particularly in the summer, our numbers increase significantly averaging around 100. In all seasons, Cathedral staff provide hours of pastoral support each week to Cathedral beloved's and the downtown community. Our presence with beloveds and volunteers has centered around resiliency skills made possible through two grants, Evangelism Grant- Episcopal Church USA and the UMC Foundation of New England-Lexington UMC Social Justice.

Coffee Hour: Thank you Dotties and a Move to Wander

This summer, we gave thanks for our many years at Dottie's coffee lounge and owner Jess Rufo as she made the decision to sell her business. Dottie's provided our community with a safe space to share in regular fellowship and enjoy coffee in a well loved coffee shop in downtown Pittsfield. With the closing of Dottie's, we moved our regular Thursday morning gather to Wander. We have been warmly welcomed over the last three months by owner Jay Santangelo and staff. Wander is a coffee shop and community space that prioritizes the needs and safety of the LGBTQIA+ community in downtown Pittsfield. It hosts an array of events each month and has become known for mocktails and sober dance parties. We are grateful to be able to move to this new location and meet new beloveds each week as we continue the practice of sharing in coffee and a platter of toastd bagels and breads.

Small Group Formation:

Prior to moving to Wander, I and community care coordinator, Becky Crane, began to meet with a small group of participants at Wander from Cathedral of the Beloved as part of my Leaders Way project at Yale Divinity School. This simple project was about cultivating the leadership within Cathedral. While I initially had hope to work with 12, as things unfolded, it became clear that three was a good starting point. In my final reflection, I wrote this:

"I began to think about Jesus call stories of the disciples differently. We meet Jesus calling Simon and Andrew as he was walking along the sea of Galilee. Most often it is read as if he called them in the spur of the moment. In an imaginative engaging of this text, I wonder if he had interactions with them before this moment we walk into. After calling them, he engaged James and John, the sons of Zebedee, later then, Levi. He did not immediately start with 12. He grew 12."

My insights into this text and my work with the Cathedral community and their nomadic nature has given me a greater appreciation for the smaller congregations in our diocese. As Jesus so often reminds us, small is holy and ripe for transformation. More to say about this in a different space.

Grants and Financial Overview

Cathedral of the Beloved's treasurer, Scott Shreve writes:

"We continue to be grateful for the funding provided to us by the diocese. It is the foundation for our programming and ministry. The \$10,000 Outdoor Worship Program Grant is 15% of our budget. We receive another \$15,000 in grants from 10 organizations, 20% of our budget, including this year a grant from the Human to Human Grant from the Diocese. The remaining 65% of our budget comes from individual donors and local congregations. The support of the diocese remains invaluable and officers and council remain grateful for its steadfast support."

Loving the Questions
The Rev. Jennifer Gregg and Craig Hammond,
Co-Facilitators

Our 2024-2025 cohort concluded with 10 participants from the Diocese of Western MA and Massachusetts. Registration for the 2025-2026 cohort continues to be finalized as we began our opening session (as of this writing) less than a week ago.

This contemplative space continues to foster a way of being as participants are taught about the practice of presence and deep listening, while also walking with others as they discern God's movement through the arc of their lives. As mentioned in last year's convention report, the three practices that continue to guide us in this space are:

- The practice of Silence
- The practice of Awareness
- The practice of Storytelling

As stated in our last report to convention, These practices help us listen as we discern what we may be called "to do." They also give us the tools to cultivate "our being." In a world that is obsessed with doing, we are aware that the most important thing we offer one another is our "presence" regardless of the outward form it takes. The two go hand-in-hand.

Our teaching of these three practices continues to be shaped through presentation, contemplative practices, including guided meditations, Lectio Divina and journaling, as well as Group Spiritual Direction.

Craig and I are grateful to continue to partner with Shalem Institute. Craig has remained in close contact with Shalem, leading small groups in their trainings for Group Spiritual Direction as the need has arisen while also remaining in contact with individuals who are committed to Group Spiritual Direction.

We also give thanks for Sarah Begg. Sarah has now been part of Loving the Questions for three years. Their original connection with us was through Shalem. They then joined Loving the Questions as a participant and have served as a facilitator for the last two seasons. We are delighted to have them with us this fall. Their experience in other settings and non-Episcopal roots have offered new depth and an ecumenical opening to our work. We are grateful for their many gifts, especially with Young Adults.

We also give thanks to The Rev. Heather Blais and Archdeacon, The Rev. Jane Greisbach as they have lead breakout sessions for those who are discerning Holy Orders. This past year,

Heather served as co-coordinator alongside Jane for these conversations. These sessions have provided those in discernment of Holy Orders to listen to other priests and deacons from the diocese about their call and understanding of their vocation currently. These breakout conversations occurred three times.

As we continue to nurture relationships with other diocese, we give thanks for the opportunity to present at the Diocese of Massachusetts discernment day. This September, The Rev. Peter Feltman-Mahan, rector of Church of the Messiah Woods Hole in Falmouth, MA and I presented at their discernment officially introducing the diocese to Loving the Questions.

Outside of these areas, I continue to co-lead Fresh Start and this year served on the Search Committee for the next bishop. This fall we held an opening retreat at the Barbara C. Harris Conference Center and had 10 participants with 2 facilitators.

Faithfully Submitted,

Jenny+