



The Episcopal Diocese of Newark

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Bishop's Office announcement: 31 Mulberry to be sold in 2024

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Dear Companions on the Journey:

The physical limitations of the current Episcopal House at 31 Mulberry Street in Newark have been apparent for many years. While we appreciated the central Newark location, Bishops Croneberger, Beckwith, and I also recognized that the building itself presents challenges in adequately supporting the ministry of our staff, congregations and diocesan organizations.

In early 2021, New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJ PAC) asked the Bishop's Office to consider selling the building to the arts center as part of a major expansion project. In response, in April 2021 I called together a small committee, the 31 Mulberry Discernment Group, with the goal of determining if the current building could meet our ministry needs or if we needed to look for a new site.

After spending a year seeking input from staff, tenants, space use specialists, architects, and commercial realtors, the group recommended to the Trustees of the Diocese and to me, that indeed it was time to sell the building and look for a new site for Episcopal House.

As a result of their recommendation, a contract for the sale of 31 Mulberry Street to NJ PAC has been signed with closing to take place by September 2024. We have two years to find, purchase or lease property, prepare the property for use, and move.

NJ PAC intends to incorporate the building into their current plan for the further development of the area around the performing arts center.

The contract price of \$3.85M represents a significant premium to the appraised value of the building, which was possible because of NJ PAC's strong desire for the property. The proceeds will be used to cover the costs of acquiring, refitting and moving into the new facility, with the balance added to the endowment that supports the annual operating budget.

To take on the important and pressing task of finding a new site for Episcopal House, I have called a group comprised of members from every Region of the diocese and convened by Sam Reckford, Chief Financial Officer to make recommendation(s) to the Trustees and me. I expect this group will need at least a year for its work.

Among the group's considerations will be finding a location that can be a visible presence in the community; is welcoming and hospitable to visitors, including better parking; how our use of space has changed during the pandemic; and what this building can be to the wider diocese. The diocesan staff earnestly desires that the new location will allow them all to be on the same floor, as the current multi-floor configuration is detrimental to their work together. The group will be considering locations both in Newark and in the wider diocese.

After a new location for Episcopal House is selected, we will use the remaining time to prepare the property to best meet the needs of the diocesan staff and of the diocesan organizations that regularly use the building.

It's important to note that while the offices where the diocesan staff do much of their day-to-day work will be moving, our Cathedral – the seat of the Bishop – is staying right where it is at Trinity & St. Philip's. And in fact, it is poised on the cusp of an exciting time in its long history. (See *What's ahead for our Cathedral?*, below.)

The diocese has been through this discernment process four times in its history, from establishing its first dedicated headquarters in Newark in 1921, then moving to Orange, then moving back to Newark to reside first at 24 Rector Street and then 31 Mulberry Street. (See *101 years, 4 buildings: The history of diocesan headquarters*, below.) I invite your prayers as we embark on this endeavor for the fifth time.

Grace and peace,
Bishop Hughes

What's ahead for our Cathedral?

While the offices where the diocesan staff do much of their day-to-day work will be moving, our Cathedral – the seat of the Bishop – is staying right where it is at Trinity & St. Philip's in downtown Newark. And with the recent arrival of its first full-time priest since 2014, it is poised on the cusp of an exciting time in its long history.

"Make no mistake, we're not going away," says the Rev. George Dredde III, who arrived at the Cathedral on April 1 as a deacon serving as full-time clergy-in-charge and whose ordination to the priesthood was celebrated there on June 6.

"We are going to be here, and we are going to become a vital part of what happens here within the diocese and within the city of Newark and Essex County. We have some wonderful opportunities here to do this."

"I'm very humbled to be here," he continues. "There's such a loving congregation here. In spite of everything they've never lost hope and they've never lost their faith. And when I see the way that they approach with reverence what they do here – they're not looking for this pat on the back stuff, they're doing this because of their love of God and their love for that Cathedral, and they're doing, in many cases, so much with so little."

"Getting George was a blessing. I'm happy he's here and I know the church is as well," says Gordon Nelson, the Cathedral's Senior Warden. "He's the right man for the job – I think God picked him before I did."

"He's got a good outlook with community," Nelson continues, "opening up the church so that people know we're there."

Dredde, whose career before his call to ordained ministry includes senior administrative roles in New Jersey state and county governance – most recently as Chief of Staff to NJ Assemblywoman BettyLou DeCroce – is now putting the networking skills he honed in political circles to use for developing ministry.

"I've had some discussions with different entities around the diocese about doing different types of partnerships," he says, "and also for us as a congregation to become much more involved in activities outside of the Cathedral, where we go to other churches to participate and become more active and involved in the things that they're doing as well."

He hopes to form partnerships between the Cathedral's urban ministry and the ministries of suburban and rural congregations in the diocese. "We're right in the middle of a city, so we think that there is some real benefit to having those kind of cross-sections."

Dredde is also exploring relationships with other denominations and groups in Newark.

"This is some fertile ground for some of the things that NJPAC is trying to do here – I'm building some relationships on that side as well as with other community entities and also within the political structure here."

Under Dredde's leadership, the Cathedral has recently reinstated its Wednesday noon Eucharist and revitalized its music ministry. Recent visitors will have noticed that an area has been carved out to the left of the altar for musical instruments including the piano, drums, and an electric organ.

“We've got some wonderful musicians in this church – some of them had been professionals in another life, others are professionals now, others have talents that just amaze me,” Dredden says, “so we want to put that to good use. We do a mix between traditional and contemporary music here and it's been well received.”

The congregation is also looking outdoors. “I'd love to be able to utilize Military Park both in a more formal basis in conjunction with NJPAC and the city of Newark,” says Dredden, “but even more importantly you've got to remember we've got some grass space of our own – I'm also trying to see how we can utilize that in a much more visible way. Any way we can show that there's life here and vibrancy, we're going to do it.”

Dredden says that the Cathedral “was a very vibrant community for a good long time and now we're very happy to try to get back to that and then beyond. There's so much good work to be done here and there's so many people here who want to do it, so I'm energized to get to work.”

"It's hard work, he knows it," says Nelson, "but we have an opportunity to grow together. We're learning from each other."

Trinity & St. Philip's Cathedral began in 1746 as Trinity Church, when it received its charter from King George II to be the first Anglican church in Newark. The original building was destroyed during the Revolutionary War after being used as a hospital by both American and British troops. The current building, completed in 1810, is the oldest Episcopal cathedral building in use in the nation.

As the first and “mother” church in Newark, Trinity served as the unofficial cathedral for many years, finally officially becoming Trinity Cathedral in 1944. In 1966 its congregation merged with the congregation of nearby St. Philip's Church, which had lost its building in a fire; the combined congregation adopted the name Trinity & St. Philip's Cathedral in 1992.

101 years, 4 buildings: The history of diocesan headquarters

The history of the four buildings that have housed the Diocese of Newark's headquarters over the last century contains echoes of the same forces that have led us to search for our next headquarters.

For nearly half a century the diocese did not have a dedicated headquarters location. It rented office space in Newark or used available space in the bishop's residence. This make-shift arrangement persisted from the diocese's founding in 1874 until 1921.

1921-1929: The first Diocesan House – 21 Washington Street, Newark

The diocese purchased the building at 21 Washington Street in Newark early in the episcopate of the Rt. Rev. Edwin S. Lines, third Bishop of Newark (1903-1927), to serve as his residence and offices. Many diocesan meetings were held in the bishop's offices there, while the diocese rented the second floor of 49 Halsey Street for additional office space, later renting the third floor as well.

But, as reported in *The Newark Churchman*, the precursor to *The VOICE*: “As time went on the street cars invaded Washington Street and business made its appearance. It became less and less desirable as a place of residence” for the bishop. Bishop Lines had also been pushing for years for a more permanent solution for diocesan offices.

So in 1921 the diocese purchased a residence for the bishop in the quieter Forest Hill neighborhood, with 21 Washington Street becoming diocesan headquarters. In 1927, the building at 19 Washington Street came on the market and the diocese purchased it for expansion.

1929-1940: The second Diocesan House – 99 Main Street, Orange

In 1929 American Insurance Company, seeking a location to build a skyscraper in downtown Newark, offered to buy the diocese's buildings at 19-21 Washington Street. "The price offered for the properties was such that the Finance and Advisory Board felt that there could be no justification for their not accepting it," reported the April 1929 issue of *The Newark Churchman*.

Meanwhile, what was then Grace Church in Orange (now Epiphany and Christ Church) had built a new parish house, leaving its old parish house sitting unused. Grace offered the building, located at 99 Main Street in Orange, to the diocese as a temporary headquarters.

This fit well with the diocese's plans at the time. Mindful that congregations were expanding westward, and that there was not yet an official cathedral, the diocese had purchased land in Cedar Grove as the intended location of the Cathedral of All Saints plus a new diocesan headquarters. So, the bishop – then the Rt. Rev. Wilson R. Stearly, fourth Bishop of Newark (1927-1935) – and the diocesan staff moved to Orange, closer to their intended final location, and fundraising began to build a cathedral and new headquarters.

Then in October 1929 the stock market crashed, and with it the diocese's plans.

1940-1997: Cathedral House – 24 Rector Street, Newark

Diocesan headquarters remained in Orange until 1940, when a plan was put in place with Trinity Church in Newark, which as the "mother church" in Newark served as the unofficial cathedral. (It officially became Trinity Cathedral in 1944. In 1992 the Cathedral officially changed its name to Trinity & St. Philip's, in recognition of its 1966 merger with the historically Black congregation of St. Philip's, Newark, which had lost their building in a fire.)

Trinity Church owned 24 Rector Street, the location of its parish house and graveyard. Trinity needed a new parish house, and the diocese needed a more permanent location for their headquarters. The solution was to tear down the old parish house, relocate the graveyard, and build a brand-new building which would serve as both a headquarters for the diocese and a parish house and offices for Trinity.

The May 1941 issue of *The Newark Churchman* reports that in addition to offices for the Rt. Rev. Benjamin M. Washburn (fifth Bishop of Newark, 1935-1958), Trinity's dean and their staffs, the new Cathedral House included All Saints' Chapel (named for the cathedral that was never built), a library, a kitchen, a choir room, and a board room plus smaller meeting rooms. It also included an auditorium with gallery that seated 600, used as the site of some Diocesan Conventions; and on the floor below it, a full-sized basketball gymnasium with bleachers, used to host diocesan youth lock-ins. Diocesan staff member John King, who attended some of those lock-ins in the late 1980s and early 1990s, recalled of the gymnasium, "It was a really cool facility."

Incidentally, 24 Rector Street is the only one of the four diocesan headquarters that was built specifically for the needs of the diocese. It remained the diocesan headquarters through most or all of the episcopates of the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth Bishops of Newark.

1997-present: Episcopal House – 31 Mulberry Street, Newark

In 1996, near the end of the tenure of the Rt. Rev. John Shelby Spong, eighth Bishop of Newark (1979-2000), New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJ PAC) purchased the property at 24 Rector Street. As part of the transaction the Cathedral received a 99-year lease to continue to maintain its offices and parish house space at 24 Rector Street, and the diocese received for its new headquarters 31 Mulberry Street, which had been vacated by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Newark.

After extensive renovations to bring 31 Mulberry Street up to fire codes and outfit it for Bishop Spong and the diocesan staff, they moved in in February 1997.