

# Parish Profile

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## We welcome your interest in our parish!

This profile tells you about who we are today and gives you an idea of where we see ourselves and our parish in the future. It also includes a section detailing our history.

The document is divided into three main sections:

- ⇒ **Introduction**
- ⇒ **Christ Church: Our Present and Future**
- ⇒ **Christ Church: History**



# Introduction

Christ Church is a spiritual community that welcomes everyone. We listen to one another, support each other, learn from each other, and celebrate our unity without uniformity. We reach out to those who are traveling their own paths, inviting them to join us on our faith journey. We are thinkers who value truth, doers who work for justice, and seekers who long to see the face of God.

Who we are as a congregation has much to do with where our original cornerstone was laid in 1907. Christ Episcopal Church is nestled in the county seat's historic hill district. We are one block from the Monroe County Court House Square, a hub for the town's farmers' market, concerts, rallies, and annual Christmas tree lighting. We are walking distance to Main Street, where shops, wineries, and restaurants reflect the tourism and college influence of East Stroudsburg University, and veterans' memorial flags hang from lampposts honoring our heroes. We are in the heart of the beautiful Pocono Mountains, long famous as a honeymoon destination.

Located off Interstate 80, Stroudsburg's proximity to New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia has made it a popular choice for second homes or as a retirement destination. In the 1980s, low taxes and a frenzy of construction brought many new residents to PA, resulting in changes to rural Stroudsburg. The community, long-time residents who grew up here and newcomers who were just discovering the area, came to know and appreciate one another. Then, twenty years later, our community opened our arms to newcomers again after September 11. Families longing for a new place to call home during a very fearful time in our country moved away from NYC to the Poconos. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, our weekend visitors became our year-round neighbors. Schools were bursting at the seams, as our new neighbors brought new foods, new worship styles, and new perspectives. As a parish we put trust in the Lord, gained equilibrium and thrived beautifully with our more inclusive congregation.

Now, twenty years later, Stroudsburg is in the midst of another real estate boom, this time brought on by the pandemic. God is calling the people of Christ Church to adapt again and grow with our changing world, with respect and appreciation. We see our differences as gifts, we value our diversity, and we seek to recognize and nurture our strengths. The original congregants specifically chose our location to establish the church to be "A welcoming, compassionate, healing community" in the center of Stroudsburg, and to reach out with open arms to love our neighbors as ourselves. That legacy is the cornerstone of Christ Church, and the members have been the foundation for more than 125 years.

The graphs that follow help to illustrate the demographic changes in Monroe County (of which Stroudsburg is County Seat) in the past ten years, using the Decennial Census Data. The patterns here mirror those around the nation, with growing numbers of people who identify with two, three, or up to five racial heritages.

### Generalized Racial Composition of Monroe County 2010 to 2020

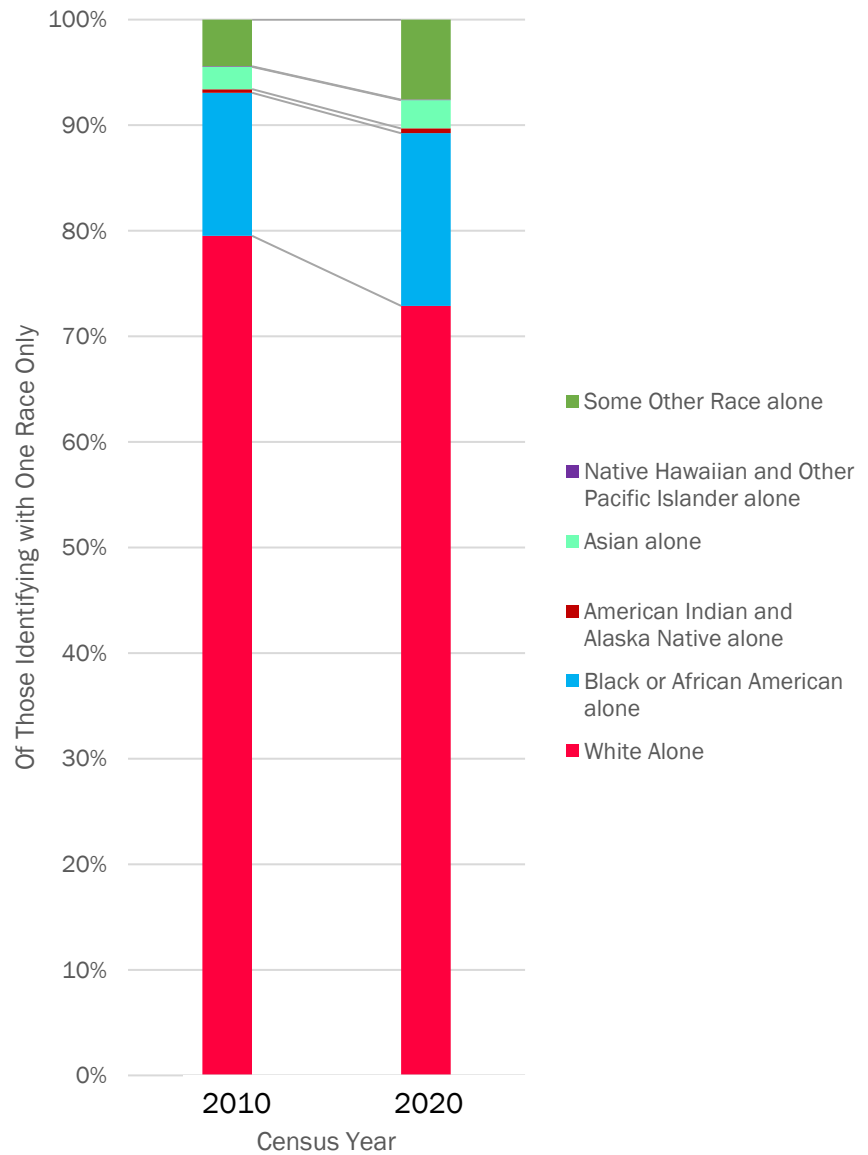


Figure 1: Of those identifying with one race only, most are still white, but Monroe County is becoming more diverse.

### Diversification of Monroe County 2010 to 2020

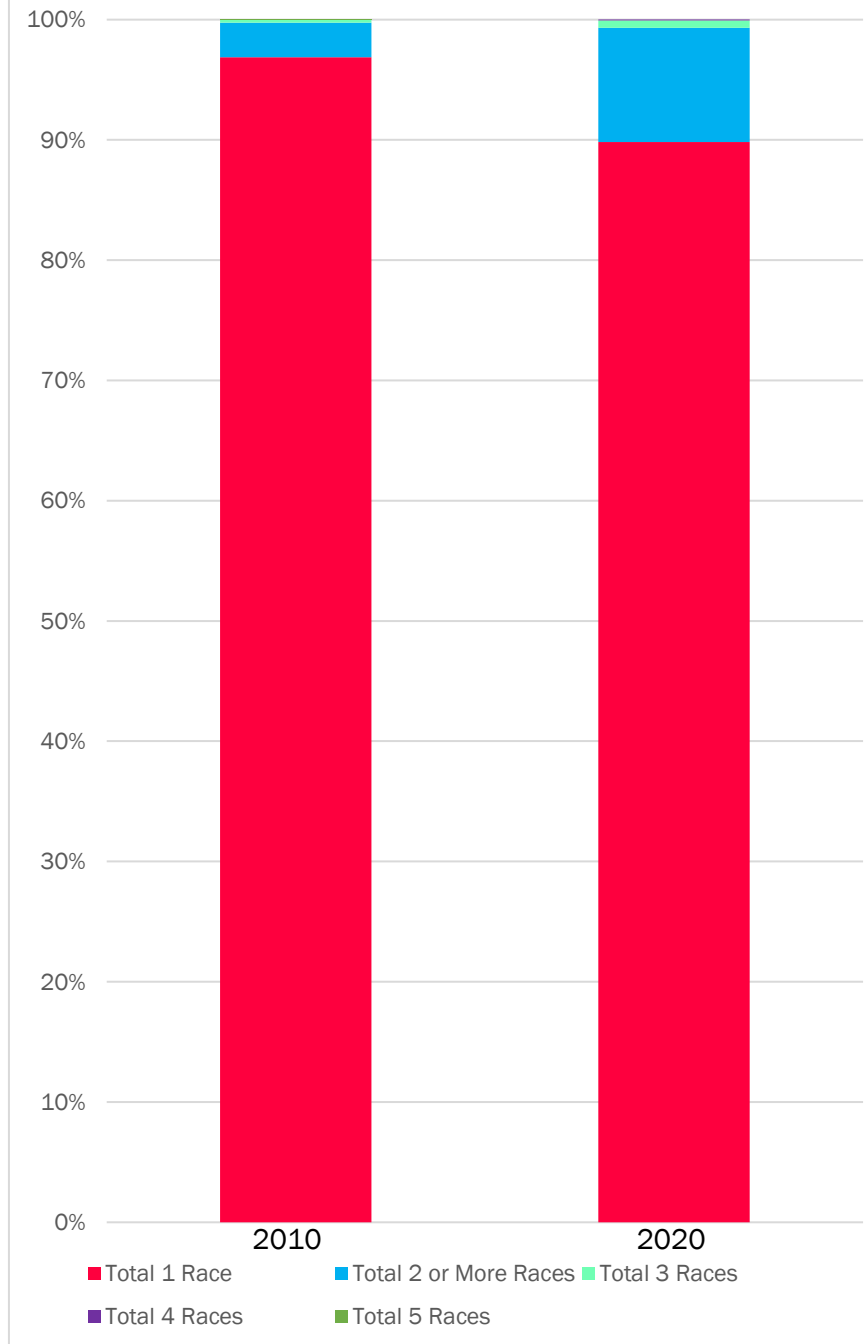


Figure 2: The number of residents identifying with two or more races has increased significantly in the past ten years.

# Christ Church: The Present

From 2010 to 2021, Christ Church was led by Father J. Douglas Moyer, and these years were incredibly productive for Christ Church. Fr. Doug retired in February 2021.

## Adapting to the Pandemic

As with all parishes, COVID-19 caught us unprepared. We had not given any consideration to livestreaming our services or any other electronic considerations. When it became clear that the shutdown would last longer than two weeks, our rector, Fr. Doug, and our assisting priest, Mo. Sidnie White Crawford, began to discuss what we might do. Mo. Sidnie, a retired professor of Hebrew Bible at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a priest from the Diocese of Nebraska, had joined our congregation as an unpaid Priest Associate in June 2018. Mo. Sidnie began Zoom morning prayer; we went from once a week to twice a week to now four times a week, with two parishioners taking one day each. When Deacon Michele Causton, a congregant in seminary, was in town, she streamed a Compline service from her home on our Facebook page. When she returned to her studies, a parishioner took over. When we originally began to stream services from the church, the rector used his smartphone. Later, we upgraded the Wi-Fi throughout the building, and he began to stream it through the Wi-Fi signal. Quality livestreaming became essential for our congregation to stay connected, and the vestry invested in a more professional setup.

Upon Fr. Doug's retirement, Mo. Sidnie agreed to aid our congregation during the transition period. During this time, Mo. Sidnie has continued the Adult Forum via Zoom. Pastoral staff returned to the church before Easter in 2020. With the help and guidance of Mo. Sidnie, we have continued to livestream since then, although we had a brief period of in-person attendance in the summer with very strict protocols. We also held two outdoor services during that period, on Easter and Pentecost Sundays of 2021. We even held a baptism on Pentecost Sunday! We came back to in-person worship in June while following Diocesan guidelines, and we have continued to livestream for those parishioners who are uncomfortable returning to in-person services. We are now in hybrid mode. The Food Pantry has continued throughout COVID-19 with strict protocols. The Daughters of the King meet online, and the prayer chain is organized electronically.

Other activities at the church virtually ground to a halt. Our office was closed, and our secretary worked from home. The choir did not meet,

although they put together special music for Christmas and began regular recordings in the spring.

Our attendance on the livestream was steady during that period, averaging about 60 people per week, with higher numbers on special days. Now we have about 35–40 people present on Sunday morning, and about the same number tune in to our livestream recordings over the week.

We have learned from COVID-19 that our congregation is very loyal to the church. For the most part, they did not seek worship opportunities at other area churches that were open for in-person worship. Our giving also held steady, although we have noticed that people have preferred to give in larger chunks, rather than weekly.

Once we were allowed to come together in limited numbers, the Vestry began a thorough outreach program involving phone calls, emails, and surveys, to make sure that we could safely bring in everyone who wanted attend Sunday services. We also found a way to safely distribute the host by wrapping individual wafers in glassine envelopes. Every other row was roped off to maintain social distancing, and the sanctuary was thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after each Sunday's service.

As we reconvene as the Body of Christ in Stroudsburg, we hope to continue offering a live-stream service every week on our website for those who greatly appreciate having access to it.

## **Our Worship**

As Episcopalians, we know that the liturgy of the church brings together actions, words, rituals, and scripture in an outward expression of the inward reality of God's presence in our lives. This unity of the beautiful liturgy is beloved by our parishioners, whether they are cradle Episcopalians or recent converts.

As a broad church we have a thirst for knowledge with a passion for social justice. We are comprehensive rather than exclusive, looking to meditate on scripture and inspired preaching to reflect upon God's will for us and our community. Our past priests have set a high standard for thoughtful and engaging sermons that help us understand the word of God as it relates to our lives.

Currently, we worship at a Rite II, live-streamed service on Sunday mornings at 9:00. Ordinarily, however, we worship using Rite I without music during our 8:00 am Sunday service. This is for those who prefer a quiet, meditative respite from a busy world. Before COVID-19, during the offering of the

Peace congregants stepped out into the center aisle, circling past each other offering the sign of peace, often greeting one another by name. This fostered a spiritual connection among the 8:00 am worshippers. Our 10:15 am was a Rite II service, with an approximately 10-member, multigenerational, close-knit choir. We have supported our organist and music director, Miss Sue, as she seeks to infuse new and more contemporary music selections in our participatory service, including many songs from the *Wonder, Love and Praise* hymnal, while also drawing us together in the beauty of more traditional hymns. Our dedicated music director leads the teen bell choir and highlights teen musicians, while fostering an encouraging atmosphere for novice choir members.

Before COVID-19, passing of the Peace was a robust and treasured part of the 10:15 service, when parishioners would come out of the pews, crossing the aisles to come together in love, and concern for each other. Now we wave, make a peace sign, nod, and bump fists. Then, pertinent weekly announcements are read. We bow our heads and unite the congregation in the weekly birthday and anniversary blessings. We currently offer open communion for anyone who feels the call to participate. Coffee Hour in the Fellowship Hall immediately following service is an extension of our fellowship and a way to deepen connections made during church. We have a weekly Wednesday noon healing service, which is attended by a small, but loyal group that includes people who work in downtown Stroudsburg and come on their lunch breaks. We once had a 5 pm Saturday service, which was an excellent intersection of older members and busy young families. Just prior to the pandemic, in an effort to address the dwindling attendance of families, we offered a shorter, more casual family service between the 8:00 and 10:15 service down in the Fellowship Hall.

## Formation

Adult Forum follows the 10:15 service. This Sunday morning staple is led by Mo. Sidnie in the library with a Zoom option. One parishioner stated, “The Adult Forum classes have been awesome. I really appreciate the cultural, historical, and linguistic contents of the books we studied, and they helped me (and I daresay a few others) to see the often-overlooked Gospel according to Mark in new ways.” Traditionally, Youth Formation begins in the nursery, continues through elementary school, confirmation classes for middle schoolers, and youth group in high school. We seek to educate our youth not just on the words of the Bible, but also how to bring the Word to life in the surrounding community and beyond. Our youth have always participated in our church services by providing music and serving as acolytes, and outside in our community through volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity, Bell Choir concerts, community service projects, and

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Membership

 188,508

Plate & Pledge

 94

Average Attendance

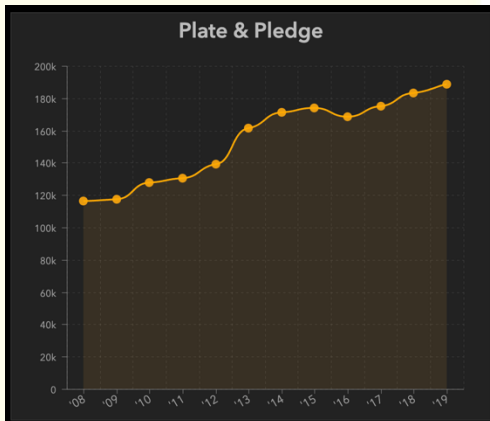


Figure 3: Although our membership numbers have fluctuated over the past thirteen years, our plate & pledge numbers have steadily risen.

partnering with local youth groups to form Youth Against Cancer, a year-round fundraising for Relay for Life team. An active and robust teen and children population has always energized our congregation, but about a year or two ago (before COVID), our high school teen group graduated, and then our Sunday School population dwindled. Within just a few years, our Sunday School attendance program significantly dropped. Now, during COVID, there is no Sunday School for children of any age. Our very small teen group works in the food pantry and, when possible, participates in diocesan events. We don't know what our Sunday School program will look like after COVID.

### Parish Life

Our congregants have traditionally given freely of their time and talents. As Father Doug resided outside of our county and was available by phone, text, and email, his longitudinal distance helped us to grow, turn toward each other for support, and become more independent as a congregation. Throughout Father Doug's tenure, parishioners served God in new ways by taking on new lay leadership roles, with the vestry and other committees overseeing organized ministries such as property maintenance, outreach, youth group, lay eucharist ministers, counters, alter guild, and the much-loved coffee hour. Our confidence in ourselves and the accepting nature of our congregation have encouraged boundless opportunities to initiate and participate in new lay ministries. Stewardship, too, has become stronger this past decade. One longtime parishioner points out that Father Doug "led us to a balanced budget for the first time in all my years at Christ Church." Our strong faith has resulted in plates and pledges increasing 62% from 2008 to 2019 (see Figure 3), while our membership has held steady at about 94 average weekly attendants. Even now, during the pandemic, with many of our congregants live streaming the service, our levels of giving have maintained steady. A past Sr. Warden called us "this little church with the big heart." That heart, our strong lay leadership, and the guidance of Mo. Sidnie are carrying us through the dual upheaval of a worldwide pandemic and the retirement as our beloved priest.

Our solid finances enable us to support outreach within and outside our church walls. We currently provide financial and spiritual support to two seminarians from our congregation. We open our church to Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Stroud Neighborhood Watch meetings, and community and ecumenical concerts. Our twice-monthly food pantry has become extremely valuable to our community, serving many area families every month. One particularly fruitful food pantry donation came from our congregation's Advent Food Tubs. The food pantry uses the downstairs fellowship hall which, for several years, was the site of the long-running



Pullen Clinic. The Pullen Clinic was a free medical clinic for the uninsured that was conceived, managed, and staffed by medical professionals and volunteers from Christ Church. Outreach beyond our church doors has included Habitat for Humanity, a St Francis' Day trip to bless animals at a local shelter, partnering up with Rotary and United Way, and participating in Bridges Out of Poverty. Christ Church has a local chapter of the Daughters of the King, a worldwide organization of Anglican women that dates from 1885. Today, membership includes other faiths, as well. The goal is to undertake a Rule of Life, incorporating The Rule of Prayer and The Rule of Service. The Daughters reaffirm the promises made at Baptism and Confirmation and pledge themselves to a lifelong program of prayer, service, and evangelism. Ours is a small chapter, but we hope to invite others to join soon. The pandemic set the group back a bit and they are working to reorganize. Christ Church has participated in the past four Diocesan sponsored mission trips to Grace House on the Mountain in St. Paul VA. One of our members is on Diocese of Bethlehem Racial Justice & Reconciliation Task Force. Another member is on the Committee on Ministry.

## **Our Path Forward**

The discernment process for the current rector search is based on information collected by our search committee through a congregation survey, focus groups, and small group conversations. During the discussions we asked, "What is our current identity?" and "What is God calling our parish to grow into and become?"

During this process, three clear insights into our current strengths became apparent. First, over the past decade, through the thoughtful guidance of Father Doug and our vestry and the continued plates and pledges commitment from the congregation, we have become financially sound. We own an office building at 624 Sarah St., part of which we rent to a business and part of which is used as our church offices. This, along with a small rental property and parking lot at 618 Sarah St., generate additional income for the parish.

Second, Father Doug's hands off style and living outside our county helped our congregation to strengthen our lay leadership. Third, we have a knowledgeable, steadfast, and grounding presence in assisting priest, Mo. Sidnie. These are the pillars that are holding up our congregation during an unprecedented time in our world and the lives of our parish community. And yet, even with these in place, some of our parishioners are feeling a little unmoored due to the pandemic and the retirement of decade-long priest. There is a void spiritually and emotionally. Our parishioners are looking for

more: more spiritual guidance, more resources, and more Episcopal structural support to be put in place to ground our parish and our community in times of uncertainty like these.

God is calling our church to work together to make our church family stronger, to reach out to people who are curious about Christ Episcopal people—those who are actively looking for a vacation church and those looking for a church home.

We recognize the opportunities to grow in three areas: formation, communication, and innovation.

### **Formation:**

We seek formation for all! Our congregation has a thirst for knowledge. We want to understand the Word of God and its context in our lives. We would welcome new ideas for faith formation. We welcome instruction in our liturgies and traditions for the young, and the old. We'd love to see a men's bible study, or intergenerational classes, classes for new members, a cradle Episcopal refresher, or formation classes for baptism; classes that are less directed by the age of a person and more about the opportunity to connect with others on their faith journey. We are interested in updating our website to have links and resources for education. If someone has a question about the Episcopal Church, we would like to help them find the answer on our website or be able to find out where to look.

### **Communication:**

Our mission statement is “We are a welcoming, compassionate, healing community.” We would like to do a better job of communicating that statement to our surrounding area and making our presence known. We are blessed with a wonderful location. We are tucked away in a little pocket of Stroudsburg. Christ Church is well known to the leaders of Stroudsburg, but we would like to explore opportunities for greater connection to our surrounding community, including the local colleges and LGBTQIA+ community. We cherish our diverse and inclusive congregation. We would like to have more present and outward representations of who we are. If someone walks by our church or goes to our website, they should see what we believe in, what we feel passionately about, and where we are in Stroudsburg. When a visitor walks through our doors, they should know that all are welcome here.

### **Innovation:**

During our focus groups, so many members had wonderful ideas for the

future: new fellowship ideas, new ministry ideas, suggestions for increasing membership, ways to connect with our surrounding area. An idea of an Innovation Board came from the plethora of new ideas. An Innovation Board would be independent of the vestry or our hardworking Sr. Warden. This would be an idea-gathering committee; it wouldn't be a governing body. It would be a way to pool our resources, work together, and get to know each other a little better without exhausting ourselves.

We have so many talented, interesting, people who are already doing wonderful work but might need some support.

Christ Episcopal Church is a diverse, welcoming, generous collection of people who are driven by faith. We may be a small church, but the love we have for one another, and our community, is larger than life. We want to celebrate our differences and use them to unite us. We want to be a church that maintains traditionalism while adapting with the times. Most importantly, we want to be a church where people know they will be welcomed with open arms, no matter where they come from or who they are. Christ Church is led by the Holy Spirit inside and outside our walls, and we want to share the spirit far and wide. We hope to find a rector who will celebrate who we are and help us strengthen our connections to God, each other, and the surrounding community.

### More Information

These articles from local and national media provide more information about what kind of place Stroudsburg is.

- [Small towns may have "a longer road ahead" in America's economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic](#) | CBS News
- [NCC Awarded Grand Prize in U.S. Department of Education's National Challenge](#) | Northampton Community College
- [Stroudsburg makes it to finals for T-Mobile's \\$3 million Hometown Techover](#) | The Pocono Record
- [The Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau](#)
- [The Pocono Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Monroe County Historical Society](#)
- [East Stroudsburg University](#)

# Christ Church: History

From Modest Roots, Christ Church

It began on April 10, 1897, when a group of Episcopalians gathered in the home of Charles H. Crowe of East Stroudsburg, PA, to celebrate Palm Sunday. The service was officiated by Sister Lucy Watt, a nun who had traveled to East Stroudsburg from the Order of St Mary in Peekskill, N.Y. A week later the group met again, this time to celebrate Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Later that month, the Archdeacon of Scranton, D. Webster Coxe, presided over the first official Episcopal service for this small band.

Just barely a year passed, and now the congregation was meeting in a hall in East Stroudsburg, as the people decided to pool their resources and step out in faith to establish a building fund and call a rector. The congregation was received into the diocese of Bethlehem as Christ Church. In early 1902, the church purchased a lot in Stroudsburg and on June 8, 1904, set the cornerstone for the building and established the rock upon which the church would be built. A little over a year later, in September 1905, the building was completed for \$7, 559.91 with no outstanding debt, but the work of the church was just beginning.

The newly consecrated parish was nestled in the residential Hill District of Stroudsburg, a leading market town and the county seat. With Main Street and the county courthouse just down the road, and East Stroudsburg Normal School, now called ESU, a few miles away over the Inter Bourgh Bridge, the church was centrally located within the community it served. Those original congregants specifically chose that location to establish the foundation of “a welcoming, compassionate, healing community.” That legacy is the cornerstone of Christ Church, and the members have been the rock for more than 125 years.

## Clergy Through the Years

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1897 | Dr. D. Webster; He presided over the first official service.  |
| 1897 | Rev. Steward Crockett, Christ Church’s first rector. Congregation began a building fund.                                |
| 1899 | Mr. Sidney Winter became rector.  |
| 1901 | Rev. Robert Caswell served as rector.   |
| 1903 | There is no regular priest for nearly 9 months, leaving the parishioners feeling disheartened. Archdeacon R.S. Radcliff |

was called by the bishop to restore and rejuvenate the flock. The church's floor, and walls were designed by N.Y. architect Manly N. Cutter, East Stroudsburg contractors the Shiffer Brothers executed the work. A Baptismal font was donated by local stone mason James Oats and sacred vestments by the wife of the Normal School's principal Sara Bible. Resources from far and wide were joining forces to build up Christ Church.

- 1905 Rev. Herbert Hastings completed and consecrated the church building during his tenure.
- 1908 Rev. H.B. Smith succeeded Rev. Hastings
- 1912 Dr. D. Webster Coxe, the Archdeacon of Scranton served as rector.
- 1919 Rev. Edwin Gray
- 1926 Rev. Leroy Eitringham
- 1927–1956 Rev. Thomas Shoemith began his 29-year tenure successfully guiding his parish through the Depression which was a time of financial hardship, but also a time of great fellowship.
- 1956 Rev. Charles A. Arch Park was called at a crossroads in the history of Christ Church. He brought construction renovations as well as spiritual revitalization. A major renovation was needed including extending the narthex, building the sacristy, basement improvements, and adding a covered entrance porch. The congregants exceeded the goal of \$75,000 and instead pledged \$83,218—an extraordinary achievement. Rev. Park introduced parishioners to a variety of modern and traditional rituals to stretch the congregation spiritually.
- 1986–1992 Father Michael Newman had a warm and vibrant personality. During his tenure he doubled the church attendance, and 25 new families became members. The columbarium was installed at this time.
- 1992–1997 Rev. Elizabeth “Penny” Moulton became the first official female rector of Christ Church. Another huge fund-raising effort began in 1994 to renovate the undercroft. \$39,000 was borrowed from the diocese. Parishioners again stepped forward with generosity and optimism to raise and pay off the loan in four years. Christ Church celebrated its 100th anniversary on Palm Sunday 1997. Bishop Paul led service that day.

- 1998–2000 Father Joseph De Acetis’ energy and strong faith encouraged the congregation to share not just financial donations but their time and talent. Father Joe reawakened the spiritual connection between congregation, the community, and the world. AA and NA meetings found a welcome home at Christ Church.
- 2000 Interim Rector Father Frederic Guyott III became ordained at Christ Church while guiding the search for a new priest.
- 2001–2009 Reverend Elizabeth Haynes was welcomed into Christ Church in November 2001. The United States was experiencing much uncertainty and Rev. Haynes provided spiritual guidance, community outreach and an active parish fellowship life. Members found a second home at Christ Church. A major renovation was also completed at this time including adding the second floor to the office wing.
- 2012–2021 Reverend Douglas Moyer was called by Rt. Rev. Paul V. Marshall to serve at Christ Church in February of 2012. During his tenure, Father Doug’s background in children and youth ministries and human resources invigorated the congregation. He recognized untapped ministries opportunities within the congregation. With guidance from Father Doug, the parish became financially sound through real estate transactions and increasing our plates and pledges.



**Written and Compiled by**

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