



INTERFAITH HISTORY IN GREATER SPRINGFIELD, 1993-2021

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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONS

In 1993 there were ten congregations of the United Church of Christ active within the city of Springfield. They were East Congregational Church, Emmanuel UCC, Faith UCC, First Church of Christ, Congregational, First Congregational Church of Indian Orchard, Foster Memorial Church, New Covenant House, St. John's Congregational Church, South Congregational Church and Union Church of Springfield. First Church of Christ, Congregational (Old First Church) founded in 1637, held its final worship service in December 2007 and sold its building to the City of Springfield.

By the start of 2022, there were only three of these congregations still active: Foster Memorial Church, St. John's Congregational Church (which had withdrawn from the UCC several years earlier) and South Congregational Church. Most of the other UCC congregations had sold their buildings and property to churches of other denominations or had united with another congregation of a different denomination. The primary causes of the closing of these United Church of Christ congregations were due to decreased membership, an inability to maintain their expenses or ministries, or the movement of members into other communities around Springfield.

COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF GREATER SPRINGFIELD 1993-2021

The Council of Churches of Greater Springfield moved their offices from Sumner Avenue to a rented building owned by St. Barnabas and All Saints Episcopal Church on Oakland Street. The member churches throughout Hampden County continued to provide programs and ministries to the area churches and communities. These included the Emergency Fuel Fund providing support in the winter months for families in need of fuel assistance, services to senior citizens, as well as coordinating the annual CROP Walk with Church World Service to support hunger programs locally and around the world. For many years the Council hosted the regional collection of used clothing which was distributed via the national CWS (Brethren Service Center) office in New Windsor, Maryland.

Every year the Council sponsored the area Week of Prayer for Christian unity services and events (January 18-25), bringing together the local Christian churches. It also sponsored the annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, first organized in 1938, for people of world faith communities,

including Native American, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity (Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox), Unitarian Universalist, Islam, and Baha'i. For many years the annual Interfaith services were held around the area in a different house of worship each year. These interfaith services, sponsored by the Interfaith Council of Greater Springfield since 2006, have been co-sponsored since 2018 with the Springfield College Office of Spiritual Life.

The Council of Churches also sponsored or cooperated with local groups during the annual observances of the January 15th birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. For many years the Council advocated against casino gambling in Western Massachusetts, on the basis of its harmful impact on certain sectors of the population, particularly those addicted to gambling. For several years, the Council planned and led an annual Interfaith Vigil and Service for individuals affected with mental illness, along with their families and invited friends. These services were sponsored with the Alliance for the Mentally Ill (AMI) of Western Massachusetts. The Council also published a resource titled "Knowing My Neighbor: Religious Beliefs and Cultural Traditions at Times of Illness and Death." The Council also developed a Chaplain On-Call program for the Springfield Police Department and supported Chaplaincy programs at Baystate Medical Center.

For several years in May or June, the Council sponsored a series of week-long Ecumenical Pentecostal Revival Services. The purpose of this annual series was to seek the spiritual growth and revival of the city churches and the people of the wider community. On December 31, 1999, the Council planned a New Year's Interfaith Service with the Spirit of Springfield and the City of Springfield New Millennium group. For a few years, the Council sponsored an Interfaith Service of Praise and Song at Springfield College with musicians and choirs from several congregations. On September 11, 2002, the Council helped plan "One Year Later: A Community Service of Memory and Hope," a special interfaith service which gave the public an opportunity to reflect on the spiritual meaning and learnings since the tragedy of September 11, 2001.

The Council organized a "Service of Prayer and Support for Al Baqi Islamic Center" whose building had been destroyed in a fire on December 8, 2004. Due to diminishing support of their member churches and the emergence of suburban ecumenical groups, the Council of Churches moved from full-time paid staff to all volunteer leadership.

The Council co-sponsored an annual House of Worship Tour with the National Conference of Christians and Jews, now known as the National Conference of Community and Justice. The

Council also sponsored a lecture series at five houses of worship on “Art and Architecture of Houses of Worship.”

VISIONS FOR SPRINGFIELD: 2004

Visions for Springfield (VFS) began in 1998 as a non-denominational Christian ministry with the mission to understand and help nurture the vitality of the church in the context of the broader urban community. VFS was guided by the Emmanuel Gospel Center of Boston and partnered with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary’s Center for Urban Ministerial Education.

VFS published *The Springfield Pictorial Christian Church Resource and Network Guide*, with its first and only edition in 2004. It is a listing of Christian churches, as of January 30, 2004, within the city limits of Springfield. The intention was that it “be used for building relationships between members of Springfield’s Christian community, for referrals, finding a church home, research in church planting, and other educational, relational or spiritual purposes.” The attempt was “to list all of the Christian churches regardless of size, denomination, ethnic identity, language or community.” This first edition lists 171 churches in Springfield in alphabetical order, and includes all churches from the small storefronts to the largest cathedrals. There are indexes of all the churches by denomination, ethnic groups represented, languages used in services, nationalities represented, zip codes, and year founded.

EAST CHURCH AND BETHESDA LUTHERAN

In the early 2000s East Church could no longer pay their bills and their membership was declining. They agreed to sell their building so that they could continue to meet as a congregation. The building was sold to another church in 2006 and they began renting space at Bethesda Lutheran Church. Soon after, a devastating fire occurred and the two churches worked together to rebuild. When their pastor retired they inquired as to sharing a pastor with Bethesda Lutheran. Bethesda’s attendance included approximately 60 members and East was 30 members. A covenant was written with East paying one-third and Bethesda two-thirds of the pastor’s compensation. Several clergy served in that shared role over the next few years. Bethesda and East had separate worship experiences and executive boards. In 2009, ministry teams were organized with representatives of both churches. During the summer both churches merged together to provide one service with combined styles. By 2015, East Church membership had decreased to approximately fifteen

people. The UCC conference encouraged East to merge with Bethesda while they still had enough people left to vote. The two churches finally merged in February 2017. Prevailing trends continued and both churches continued to decline. They are now faced with the possibility of selling Bethesda's building.

ELCA SPRINGFIELD

Bethesda Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church began meeting in a basement on Union street in 1891 and were later chartered in January 1892. They transitioned from all Swedish to all English in 1945. They are part of the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America whose current bishop is Rev. James Hazelwood. Bishop Hazelwood is in his second six-year term.

TRANSITION OF THE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF GREATER SPRINGFIELD TO INTERFAITH COUNCIL OF GREATER SPRINGFIELD

The Council of Churches of Greater Springfield and the Interfaith Council were separate organizations and did not collaborate very often. Rev. Barbara Schenk and Rev. Lauren Holm served on the Council of Churches, became increasingly uncomfortable with the chair running everything and the council rubber stamping whatever was asked of them. The final blow occurred in the debate of the proposed casino. Clergy opposed the casino as did the Council of Churches. And though the Council chair was opposing the Casino proposal publicly, the chair was privately working out an agreement with the Casino group. Rev. Schenk and Rev. Holm resigned their membership in protest, subsequently attending their first Interfaith Council meeting in the wake of the Sandy Hook, Newtown, CT school shooting. Responding to this crisis energized the Council and the membership grew along with the Council's activity level and public profile. During Rev. Holm's time on the Interfaith Council, she served as the Council's secretary and played a large role in revising its bylaws and organizational structure to what it is today.

CAMPAIGN NONVIOLENCE, LOCAL CHAPTER

In 2014 Sr. Jane Morrissey organized a group to plan a walk and rally from Court Square to the Rebecca Johnson school. Sr. Morrissey explains, "I was part of that group, representing the Interfaith Council. The walk/rally was successful and Sr. Morrissey urged the group to continue as Greater Springfield Campaign NonViolence. This new group became part of Campaign Nonviolence which is affiliated with Pax Christi. Rev. Lauren Holm became the chair and still functions in that role. This group has also created a spinoff Nonviolent Springfield Coalition to

focus on gun violence in Springfield. Their major concern is gun violence, in addition to racism, domestic violence, and climate crisis. The Nonviolent Springfield Coalition has held trainings on Kingian Nonviolence, and this group is trying to get a training session into Springfield Middle Schools.”

AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES

The many currently active African American churches in Springfield include Alden Baptist Church, Family Church, Shiloh Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Mission Church of the Living God in Christ, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Progressive Community Baptist Church, St. John’s Congregational Church, Wesley United Methodist Church, Canaan Baptist Church of Christ, Third Baptist Church, Solid Rock Community Baptist Church, and New Jerusalem Church of God in Christ.

ZION COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

Zion Community Baptist Church was founded and organized in 1984 in the home of the founding pastor. Zion Church purchased the church building of the former Bethlehem Baptist Church on Roosevelt Avenue and its new church home was dedicated in 1990. Following the retirement of the founding pastor, its second senior pastor was installed in 2016.

MT. ZION BAPTIST

In April of 1991, the second Pastor of Mt. Zion was elicited from the local Church community; Rev. Morris A. Goggins, Sr, was installed July 21, 1991. Rev. Goggins brought with him an energy and a new a vision: “Holy Ghost Headquarters.” Under the direction of Rev. Goggins, many new things began to happen. There were so many blessings those first six years, it’s impossible to list all. And yet, much to the surprise of the congregation, Rev. Goggins resigned to accept another position.

Rev. James Williams was elected as the third Pastor by the congregation, taking on this leadership role as he was installed in May 2001. His agenda centered on the Word, preaching to the Church as a whole. And when he was not visiting the sick, Rev. Williams was praying for each member’s soul. He was also concerned about God’s House. A small parcel of land, located adjacent to the rear of the church where congregants park is eyed for expansion. Sadly, in June 30, 2008 Rev. James B. Williams passed away. The community hired Rev. Milton White, Jr. to serve as Interim Pastor, followed by Rev. Bert A. Johnson who maintained his role through 2010.

On May 22, 2011, the Rev. Atu O. White took on the pastoral leadership role, becoming the congregation's fourth pastor. Pastor White coined a new motto for the church, "A Place of Healing, Help, & Hope." Hundreds of souls would eventually be saved under his divine scope. Four major projects were contracted to improve and maximize space: (1) siding on the back of the building was replaced; (2) the mural in the sanctuary was removed; (3) a downstairs conference room was created; and (4) the women's restroom was improved. In August 2021, a bid was accepted by the City of Springfield for the community to buy land next door at 380 Bay Street, creating an opportunity to expand. During this time, an unexpected development arose to offer an opportunity for the community: the Dunbar Community Center was about to foreclose. The building, located in the McKnight neighborhood, was purchased by Mt. Zion Baptist Church, resulting in the community's footprint growing from approximately a 3,000 square foot space to an over 30,000 square foot location. The new facility might be described as a two-part church abode: a newer portion built in 2001 and the historic side built over a century old. My Zion Baptist church celebrates forty-plus years of ministry.

PASTORS' COUNCIL OF GREATER SPRINGFIELD

The Pastors' Council of Greater Springfield brings together several pastors and their congregations. It sponsors annual worship services during Lent and Holy Week and the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., worship celebration.

EASTERN ORTHODOX

The Eastern Orthodox Church is represented in Springfield by St Peter and St. Paul Orthodox Church, which was established in 1916 on Carew Street. This parish is associated with St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church of West Springfield, which moved to a new location in Enfield, CT. Both parishes and other Eastern Orthodox churches in the greater Springfield and western Massachusetts area are part of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and the Orthodox Church Abroad. These traditions include historic Orthodox churches from Finland, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

HINDUISM

There are practicing Hindus in Springfield and Western Massachusetts. The Hindu Temple of Massachusetts is in Acton, Massachusetts. The Hindu philosophy is based on Sanathana Dharma (Ageless Wisdom) whose tenets are Truth, Love, Peace, Right Conduct, and Non-violence. Hindus

participate in lifelong learning and celebration of Hindu festivals and cultural events, daily worship services to Hindu gods, and spiritual masters in accordance with traditional Hindu rituals and customs. Hindus engage in community service, support humanitarian causes, and seek to promote understanding and respect for Hindu philosophy.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS

The nearest centers of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, also known as the Hare Krishna movement founded in New York City in 1966, are in East Hartford and Boston.

A HISTORY OF SINAI TEMPLE

Late 1990, under the leadership of Rabbi Shapiro, the interior of the Temple building was renovated. Rabbi Shapiro worked closely with our educators enriching the Religious School experience and was a leader in expanding the social action programming. Rabbi Shapiro developed and nurtured the weekly Shabbat morning Torah Study sessions into the core aspect of the Sinai life that it is today. The congregation continues to rely on strong, thoughtful, and very active lay leadership in the form of Temple officers, Board members and volunteers who have always helped sustain the Temple and congregation.

In 2006, Sinai Temple marked their 75th anniversary with the restoration of their Torah scrolls, a Scholar in Residence weekend, an adult Hebrew reading program involving over seventy-five learners, congregational development of the Sinai Mission Statement and two social action projects which raised funds to build a playground for a Springfield public school, and to provide swimming lessons for needy Springfield children. Every child in their Religious School participated in creating a tile mosaic for the crossword installation piece entitled "The Alphabet of our Jewish Lives" that hangs in our Oneg Shabbat Room. The quilt that hangs in the auditorium was created by our Religious School students in honor of the Sixtieth Anniversary in 1991.

In 2008, Cantor Mekler left the Sinai Temple after 29 years of music, spiritual leadership, and connection and Cantor Martin Levson joined the staff. He brought his guitar and a wealth of musical energy and engagement. Under his direction and with his passion, the junior choir became Shir Fun and flourished. He and his wife Sheri, who taught in the Religious School, brought musical theatre to Sinai, staging Music Man, Oliver, Fiddler and of Children Eden.

In June 2016, the congregation honored Rabbi Shapiro upon his retirement and Rabbi Howard Kosovske became the interim Rabbi to guide the community in the transition from Rabbi Shapiro's longtime leadership to that of a new settled Rabbi. On July 1, 2018 the community took

the next step into its future as Rabbi Jeremy Master became our settled rabbi and celebrated a rousing Erev Shabbat service on July 6. The Sinai family is very happy to welcome Rabbi Master and his family.

The congregation, like many religious congregations outside of large urban areas, experienced a significant drop in membership beginning in the early 2000's. After years of financial study and much congregational and Board soul searching, we made the painful decision that the financial health of Sinai required a return to a single clergy model. As a result, Cantor Levson left us on June 30, 2018 and Cantor Wayne Krieger joined us on July 1, 2018. Cantor Krieger's position is that of part time Cantorial specialist to provide musical leadership to supplement Rabbi Master's considerable musical talents.

Since 2019, we have moved to yet another phase for Sinai. Rabbi Alana Wasserman and experienced teacher Kate Monge will direct the Temple's religious school for 2020-2021. In addition, the community will be joined again by our Cantor-in-Residence, Bruce Ruben for High Holiday and several Shabbat services.

BAHA'I FAITH

The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent, monotheistic religions. Founded in Iran in 1844, it now has more than five million adherents in 236 countries and territories, and from virtually every racial, ethnic, and religious background. The Bahá'í Faith accepts the divine origin and common purpose of all the major world religions, and teaches that God has revealed a new message in this day to establish the oneness of humanity. Worldwide, Bahá'ís are working to give practical expression to this vision of world unity.

In Western Massachusetts, Bahá'í history began by 1895, when Springfield native Thornton Chase (1847-1912), adopted the new faith. Chase is remembered as the first American Baha'i and, indeed, the first person from the Western world to believe in Bahá'u'lláh and the principles of love, unity and social justice that He taught. The activities of the Bahá'í community are based on these principles.

Bahá'í activities and Holy Day celebrations and commemorations are open to all, regardless of class, ethnicity or religious background. Inspired by the unifying vision set out in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, we invite everyone to walk a path of service and learn together about the process of community building.

The community-building activities revolve around meetings that strengthen the devotional character of the community, classes that nurture the tender hearts and minds of children, groups that channel the surging energies of junior youth, and study circles that focus on the application of spiritual principles.

Classes for children, open to all, teach spiritual attitudes and behavior based on Bahá'í principles. Developing the moral capacities in our children is of fundamental importance, not only to their own future happiness, but to the service and advancement of our entire society. Parents everywhere are looking for ways to give children this spiritual education, to lay the foundations for their children to have noble characters and fruitful lives.

In addition to practicing private prayer and meditation, Baha'is gather in their homes and communities for collective worship. Devotional gatherings are scheduled regularly to share a devotional spirit of joy, love and fellowship. Readings are taken from the Baha'i writings and the scriptures of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and others. Musical selections are diverse, coming from a variety of cultures and styles. There is no established ritual and no solicitation of funds. Light refreshments are often served.

The junior youth spiritual empowerment program is designed to help them form a strong moral identity and empowers them to contribute to the well-being of their communities and the world at large. By developing their spiritual qualities (virtues), their intellectual capabilities and their capacities for service to society, the participants come to see that they can become agents of positive change in the world.

Study circles help those who take part to develop the knowledge, spiritual insights and skills needed to start – and most importantly, to sustain – the activities that will help their community. What is my purpose in life? How can I make a positive contribution to the world? What happens when I die? These key questions, and many others, are explored in a sequence of courses designed to help people develop spiritual values, positive habits, and meaningful social relationships in their lives. All of this contributes to building a community concerned with material and spiritual progress. The courses offer participants the chance to help build a community, focused on the spiritual ideals of the oneness of humankind and of religion, the equality of the sexes, and all of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings.

The Baha'i community was formerly active in the interfaith activities of the Council of Churches of Greater Springfield and now continues in the Interfaith Council of Greater Springfield.

For more information about the Baha'i Faith please visit Baha'i.org.

GREEK ORTHODOX

In 1992, Fr. Kyriakos (Kerry) Saravelas came to St. George from the Dormition Church in Somerville, MA. Fr. Kerry was also a native Bostonian that grew up with Archbishop Iakovos as his mentor and priest. Fr. Kerry built up the Bible Study group into a thriving group of more than sixty parishioners from St. George and other local parishes. During his tenure, the enormous slate roof on the Cathedral Church and the rubber roof on the Cultural Center were replaced through the efforts of the Building Fund Board of Trustees. Upon the completion of the above-mentioned roof project, the time seemed right to do away with the bingo that supported the community for over a decade. Perhaps the greatest memories for many people during Fr. Kerry's tenure would be the two trips to the Holy Lands that he led from St. George. Filling a coach bus each time with members of St. George and other communities, the trips took pilgrims to all of the greatest sites including Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and the Dead Sea. As the parish was aging and many of the leaders of the Council and Building Fund were in their 60s and 70s, one of Fr. Kerry's primary goals was to build up the Council with some younger parishioners that would take the administrative duties from the older generation.

In May of 2001, just as Fr. Kerry was planning to leave for a smaller parish in Newburyport, MA, the St. George community hosted Archbishop Demetrios to celebrate one hundred years of Orthodox presence in Western Massachusetts. Following the Divine Liturgy, a large banquet was held at the Sheraton in downtown Springfield. Clergy and members from other communities also joined His Eminence to celebrate the milestone.

In October of 2001, Father Christopher (Chris) Stamas took the reins as the pastor and immediately began to concentrate on implementing the Bible-based stewardship system of giving. In 2004, the Parish Council initiated an extensive renovation project totaling over one-million-dollars that sought to restore and renovate both the aging Church and Greek Cultural Center, now thirty years old. With the assistance of the Building Fund, an appointed Restoration Committee and countless parishioners, the painting of the entire interior of the Cathedral, the restoration of all

the Cathedral's stained glass windows, the updating of the sound system and some iconography have all added to the worship experience for the parish.

In 2006, as the restoration of the stained glass windows neared completion, a special ceremony was held dedicating the window above the northern balcony to the priests that had served at St. George since the 1930s. Fr. Athanasios Demos, the chancellor of the Metropolis of Boston who represented Metropolitan Methodios, and Fr. Kerry Saravelas were on hand to celebrate the Divine Liturgy together with Fr. Chris. At the Dedication Luncheon, those who had known each of the priests well spoke about their contribution to the St. George community. It was a memorable day for all those who attended as the community was about to embark on its 100th Anniversary Year.

In 2007, as the community celebrated its 100th Anniversary, the people gathered several times to celebrate and remember the history that made the community what it is – an active and welcoming community of faithful people that love their Church. In late April, the Panagia Chapel dedicated to the Nativity of Theotokos was consecrated by Metropolitan Methodios after an extensive renovation took place. A new throne, tile floor, rug, and Byzantine stained glass windows were added while the walls and ceilings were painted. An icon of the Pantocrator (Christ Almighty) was installed in September just before the start of Glendi 2007. In November of 2007, almost three hundred members of the community gathered at the Sheraton Ballroom to celebrate with Archbishop Demetrios the 100th year and the progress that has been made in all aspects of the community. Following speeches by the Roman Catholic Bishop, Fr. Chris and the president of the Parish Council, Archbishop Demetrios took the stage and "left our hearts burning within us". Those who were there realized that our Church, despite the smaller numbers we once saw, is progressing in many ways nationally, regionally and locally.

On February 13, 2008, at the exact moment that a funeral was about to take place in the Cathedral, smoke started to fill the entire nave. The alarms immediately activated and the fire department was called. Within two months, the wall and floor were completely restored and, by November of that year, a new icon was installed. Thankfully, like the fire in 1974, this boiler mishap was covered by insurance including the cost of a new Byzantine icon of the Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah. In the years that followed, great progress was made in restoring the mechanical systems in both the Cathedral and Greek Cultural Center.

After eighteen years, Fr. Chris left St. George's on September 30, 2019, as he was reassigned to another community in order to be closer to his elderly and sick family members. As over one hundred years have passed, the community has changed in many ways. While this is still very much a Greek Orthodox Church, the community is now made up of Orthodox Christians from several countries including Lebanon, Russian, Georgia, Romania, and, of course, from Greece. They also welcome many others from a variety of Christian traditions and more nationalities than can be counted. They now are baptizing children that are from the fourth and fifth generation born in this country. Much has changed but one thing still remains the same: the Orthodox Faith and Traditions that have been with them and their ancestors for twenty centuries. As a Church of God, it is progress on the spiritual front that they continue to seek and to strive to accomplish as a community. With God's grace and the unwavering faith of the parishioners, that progress will continue for many years to come.

SPRINGFIELD CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH

In 1991 the Mont Marie Health Care Center was established as a licensed, certified medical facility. One residence for low-income adults opened in 2008; a second opened in 2010. Both house sisters and lay people.

In 2001, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield, which also includes those in Worcester, MA, were joined by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rutland, Vermont. Today, this combined Congregation of Springfield has just under 200 Sisters continues to serve the people of God through a variety of ministries.

It's unfortunate but no one could envision that the complex in Holyoke would be sold to help ease the financial burden of such a large complex, and an aging congregation whose members had worked years in diocesan schools and parishes without compensation. The Mont Marie Day Nursery, later called Mont Marie Child Care Center, originally opened in 1975, closed in 2011.

The sisters operated the Weston Center for Women, also known as Weston Rehab, for twenty years until it closed in 2012 due to financial issues. It served women leaving incarceration and dealing with addiction. According to 2012 figures, 126 sisters, or half of the congregation, are currently earning an income. Of those, 81 work full-time (less than one-third of the congregation) and 45 work part-time. Many sisters volunteer their time to serve in one or more of a variety of ministries.

In 2014, thirty retired Springfield Sisters of St. Joseph relocated to the Boston area after the sale of Mont Marie. The congregation is still able to use the chapel there, which is where women will celebrate their fifty years as members of the order. It was estimated that by 2017, only forty-seven of the 200 members would remain as wage earners in the community, according to a recent actuarial study.

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD

In November of 1992, then Bishop Marshall approved a process requiring each parish to conduct a feasibility study of its holdings. Each parish was asked to qualify itself based on financial, pastoral and demographic resources. Under Msgr. Bonzagni's guidance, parishes were instructed in making contingency plans for its future. This process was set in place to give the diocese the ability to assign priests in an equitable manner during the priest shortage. It was also to help in a futuristic way as the diocese responded to a lack of clergy to cover the needs of the many parishes, which would cause mergers, yoking and closures. By August 1993, parishes were yoked, a type of combining process, in Adams and North Adams with other yoking of parishes to follow.

While this was happening the diocesan schools office was addressing the recession of the 1990's and a decrease in enrollment in a few communities as well as communities like Chicopee that had too many parish schools for the enrollment. In 1995, working with the feasibility study St. Joan of Arc was merged with St. George, and in 1996 Our Lady of Mount Carmel was closed.

In the spring of 1994 Bishop Marshall informed the faithful of the diocese that he was diagnosed with degenerative bone disease brought on by a fast developing cancer. At the same time the Episcopal Bishop of Western Massachusetts Robert Denig informed his community that he was diagnosed with bone marrow cancer. Announced at the same time was the surgery Bishop O'Neil who had a malignant tumor that was at one point life threatening. The illnesses of these three Bishops two Catholic and one Episcopal shook the Springfield area communities. Sadly for members of both faith denominations; Bishop Marshall died on July 3, 1994, Episcopal Bishop Robert Denig passed away on May 20, 1995 and Bishop O'Neil survived for a few years and died on November 30, 1997.

The Diocese joined with Council of Churches of the greater Springfield in a campaign against the development of a casino in the downtown area. Bishop Dupre was installed on May 8, 1995 as the Seventh Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield.

After several years of trying to work to relieve the financial pressures facing the Sisters of Providence Health Care system, Holyoke Hospital, Ludlow Hospital, and Westfield's Noble Hospital, negotiations broke down. As a result, on September 10, 1996, the Sisters of Providence Health System (SPHS) closed the acute health care facility in Holyoke and reopened it as a regional center for behavioral health issues. This closure went hand in hand with the opportunity in 1997 to join the Eastern Mercy Health System of Radner, PA and the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany Health System of Tampa, Florida to form Catholic Health East. This merger was not as beneficial as it originally seemed, failing to ease the financial concerns of the sisters. There were a few positives, however, providing jobs to replace the close to four-hundred which had previously been lost. The new health system acquired nursing homes in Springfield and Lenox, while also adding to its portfolio the new Family Life Center at the renamed Mercy Medical Center. Bishop Dupre lobbied for funding to help the SPHS which in the short-term helped but did not secure its long-term future.

It was not only churches and schools that were forced to merging or close but the Passionists were forced to close their retreat house in West Springfield due to low numbers, St. Hyacinth College and Seminary in Granby, MA closed, and St. Francis Chapel in Springfield was shuttered.

The facilities in the diocese continued to see changes to their use as the Sisters of Providence repurposed a good portion of the mother house into an independent housing complex, later added a separate facility named Mary's meadow. The Sisters of St. Joseph changed their infirmary to a public nursing facility all the while merging with Sisters of St. Joseph in Vermont.

The merging process continued as the diocese saw Williamstown, Hadley, Agawam, and Indian Orchard go through the painful process of coming together as one. St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Springfield, St. Ann in West Springfield, and our Lady of Mount Carmel in Ware, and Mater Dolorosa in Holyoke closed. Buildings were used for limited purposes, demolished, or sold and unused for non-sacred purposes. It was interesting to see that at the same time communities that were developing and growing opened new churches; Wilbraham and Westfield were fortunate to each welcome a new parish.

Fire can be a devastating experience. Most notable for the Diocese of Springfield was during the merger of Sacred Heart and Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Holyoke. The fire destroyed Our Lady of Perpetual Help and its homeless shelter, Loretta House. The parish school and rectory were severely damaged during the nine-alarm fire. The following year, Bishop Dupre closed the

school and used the insurance funds of \$18 million to renovate the former Sacred Heart and rename it Our Lady of Guadeloupe Parish, help fund a new Holyoke Catholic High School and provide endowments for Holyoke parishes and schools.

Entering the new millennium the Roman Catholic Diocese saw an upward swing in the enrollment at Cathedral High School, new additions at St. Mary's Parish in Lee and Holy Cross Parish in Springfield, and endowment funds for the schools and parishes. This new dawn welcomed in changes to the cemetery's and hospital ministries, youth ministry and the creation of an office for Social Concern.

Following a decline in parish membership and attendance at weekly Mass, many churches in the diocese have been merged, yoked or closed. In 2010, sixty-five parishes closed their doors with thirteen of those parishes housing newly yoked or merged Catholic communities. Bishop Timothy McDonnell was responsible for the majority of these parish closures. Three high schools have closed as well: Cathedral High School in Springfield, Holyoke Catholic High School in Chicopee, and St. Joseph Central High School in Pittsfield. Subsequently, Cathedral High (Springfield) and Holyoke Catholic High merged to become Pope Francis Preparatory School. As of 2021, the diocese has eighty-one open and thriving parishes!

Chapter 6:

- History/Focus of Interfaith Council (History, Purpose/Mission, etc.)
- Data collected from faith participants of ICGS