

## ***Church of the Common Ground Parish Profile***

Revised: October 23, 2019

### **OVERVIEW**



Church of the Common Ground (“CCG” or “Common Ground”) is a worshiping community and ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta. We are a “church without walls” on the streets of downtown Atlanta, providing support for the pastoral and spiritual needs of women, men and youth who live on the margins of our city. Our parishioners often struggle with chronic physical or mental illness, lack of employment, or fractured families. They frequently have no place to live or they experience housing insecurity. Our congregation is found in the heart of Atlanta, near the neighborhoods, shelters, parks, and public spaces where life is hard and

complicated.

Annually, more than 3,000 people worship, pray, share fellowship, or volunteer at CCG services and programs. The core congregation membership fluctuates between 40 and 60 people. Members of CCG find connection to Christian worship, fellowship, opportunities for spiritual formation, and pastoral care. In addition, they benefit from the church’s connections to local service providers—such as Crossroads Community Ministries—to access health care, mental health and social services, and resources to obtain food, clothing, and shelter. Staff members and parishioners of CCG, together with numerous volunteers from other parishes, form a vital network of sisters and brothers in Christ who are present to help one another on the streets of Atlanta.

### **HISTORY**



Church of the Common Ground’s story began with the inspiration and hard work of the Reverend Bob Book and Holly Book, who were in turn inspired by their experience with Ecclesia Ministries at Common Cathedral in Boston. On Christmas Eve 2006, CCG held its first worship service and Holy Eucharist in Woodruff Park, located on Peachtree Street in downtown Atlanta. We have worshiped in or near the park every Sunday since. As the ministry grew, an indoor space was added, at 170 Trinity Avenue, in order to offer more programs: a non-medical foot clinic, art program, Bible study, afternoon movie, medical clinic, and recovery meetings. Common Ground became a vibrant spiritual community thoroughly integrated into the then struggling neighborhood. The Reverend Mary Wetzel came to

CCG in January of 2010 as an assistant priest. Shortly thereafter, in 2011, she became the vicar upon Bob Book’s retirement.

This period of rapid growth was both a blessing and a challenge. It encouraged us to reflect more

intentionally about who we are as a church and what we are called to do. Spurred by God’s calling to take the church to the streets, it was with both sadness and excitement that we left the building and returned to where Church of the Common Ground started—back to Woodruff Park, worshiping on the street. Along with this transition, the Rev. George Maxwell of the Cathedral of St. Philip created a vestry-like leadership structure in the form of an Advisory Committee (consisting of clergy and lay volunteers) to assist with ongoing visioning, strategic planning, fund raising, and Diocese awareness. This was a great gift to Common Ground, creating and strengthening a solid operational foundation.

In November of 2017, the Rev. Mary Wetzel retired, and the Rev. Monica Mainwaring came on board as our new vicar. Monica brought an abundance of gifts for visioning, structuring, outreach, and organization. Those gifts continue to support our ministry as we begin again the process of a vicar search.

## DEMOGRAPHICS



Church of the Common Ground’s geographic coverage area is downtown Atlanta, reflecting the larger presence in that area of persons experiencing homelessness. Primarily, our members are considered “unsheltered homeless” and / or “chronic homeless,” and most are adult males. We rarely see families, but single females are some of our most consistent members.

Homelessness in Atlanta is a pervasive presence and high-profile civic issue, one that is shared by other large American cities. The city’s lead agency, the well-regarded Partners for HOME, reports that in 2019 the city (mostly concentrated downtown and in nearby pockets) had 3,217 persons experiencing homelessness during the “Point In Time” annual count. Of these, 719 were “unsheltered”. Homelessness increased by five percent over 2018, but the total has decreased by twenty-five percent since 2015. The characteristics of persons experiencing homelessness include either physical, mental health, substance abuse issues, or some combination of these traits. This compounds the underlying issues such as lack of education, loss of documentation, low work skills, and challenges.

A very different constituency at Church of the Common Ground is represented by our “visiting churches.” These are churches who send volunteers to worship with us and who provide lunches after the service. These folks are for the most part from Episcopal congregations; they come in groups ranging from four or five volunteers to a dozen or more. We depend on their good graces to be a welcoming presence and to provide a meal for our members. Their participation is vital to the work of CCG. They help CCG members feel known and cared for, rather than invisible.

Downtown Atlanta is a very different place than it was even ten years ago, as more people live and are continuing to move to downtown. Much commercial development is evident on the edges of this growth. Georgia State University is located downtown and has grown into an enormous presence, with dozens of high-rise student dorms. The hotel and convention business drives much of the downtown economy, along with Georgia State and several large office

complexes. A remnant of historic churches remains downtown, with most flourishing, including St. Luke's Episcopal Church, where CCG's offices are located.

## CCG TODAY



CCG strives to create an open and welcoming place for all to worship and grow together; to serve the hurt, the forgotten, and the wounded; and to equip parishioners for the life and the work to which God calls them. We aim to live into our baptismal commitment to “uphold the dignity of every human being, and to seek and serve Christ in all persons.” We especially seek to connect with those who feel lost, are far from “the tended fold,” and who long for Christian fellowship and support.

We are very mindful and thankful for the tremendous support we receive from parishes across the Diocese. A different parish visits every Sunday with bag lunches and, more importantly, open hearts to expanded relationships. We receive donations of greatly needed hygiene kits, coffee supplies, socks, and needed financial support. It only takes one or two visits to CCG to be transformed, and to realize how much our parishioners have given the visitor.

But we receive more than financial and volunteer support from our supporting parishes. For example, for nearly 30 years the Cathedral of St. Philip has hosted a Homeless Requiem on All Saints Day, where those who have died on the streets of Atlanta in the last year are remembered and honored. At this event, CCG parishioners and volunteers offer a Foot Clinic to those whose feet are their only means for accessing desperately needed services. St. Luke's Episcopal Church offers free office space, parking for our church van, a site for our weekly foot clinic, and a community of support...and more, for as one CCG parishioner put it: “Two things about St. Luke's are always true: when I sit in the pew, no one moves away from me, and no one tells me that I have to sit where no one can see me.”

Affirmation of how impactful Church of the Common Ground has been to its parishioners occurs right on the streets. Here is one of many vivid stories illustrating the tangible impact of the ministry. One of our parishioners had had a loud argument with a companion, and the police were called. Since fault could not easily be determined, both were detained and placed in separate squad cars. As the car with our parishioner was pulling away, she called out to the officer, “There's someone from my church! Please stop and let him pray for me.” Surprisingly, the officer stopped and allowed her friend to approach and share a moment of prayer. After observing this, the officer was so moved that he released our church member. She identified herself and her friend to the officer as members of the Church of the Common Ground, who support one another in prayerful community on the streets. Now that's church!

Church activities include Sunday worship with Holy Eucharist in downtown Atlanta's Woodruff Park, Morning Prayer, Bible Study, and a weekly foot clinic. CCG also provides opportunities for members to serve their communities, to participate in spiritual reflection days and retreats, to practice peer-to-peer pastoral care, and to study through the Theology from the

Margins certificate program. We also connect CCG members to the broader network of nonprofit service providers who can provide social services and support.

People who live on the margins often do not feel at home inside the buildings and worship spaces of traditional, indoor churches. CCG is an answer to their need to belong to a church community on “common ground,” where *they* live. This church community knits members together in a network of support. Another story illustrates this web of support. Frank was surprised to hear from his daughter, whom he had not seen for 27 years. He told her to meet him “by the fountain” in Woodruff Park on Sunday afternoons, where he is a faithful worshipper with CCG. Their reunion was joyful, a miracle even, one of dozens of stories large and small of hope and redemption that we are privileged to witness.

As a worshipping community of the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, we receive some funding from the Diocese and Episcopal parishes—but this support does not cover all of our annual operating costs. We rely on individual donors and occasional grants. We also invite, connect, include, and collaborate with people, partners, congregations, and service providers of many denominations, faiths, and theological beliefs. Our goal is to create an open, welcoming, and accepting church community where **all are welcome**.

This all-inclusive community of worshipping Christians has taught many of us more about how community is lived out than we could have ever known anywhere else. We laugh, cry, pray, and reach out to each other, tenderly holding one another’s burdens. In this process we have discovered how very alike we are in our hearts and in our love for God. Truly, we are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, all of us living on the same Common Ground.

## MINISTRY PROGRAMS



Common Ground offers pastoral outreach on the streets of Atlanta; has formed solid connections with civic leaders; has strengthened partnerships with social service agencies (such as Central Outreach and Advocacy Center, Gateway, Good Samaritan Health Clinic, and Crossroads Community Ministries); recruits young adult interns and volunteers for service as part of their vocational discernment; staged a well-attended symposium on homelessness that included members

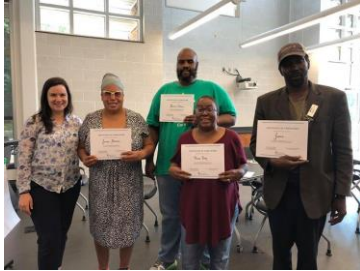
from the national Ecclesia network of street ministries; launched a Theology from the Margins certificate course for CCG members; and forged new pastoral care relationships with theological schools, seminaries, and The Training and Counseling Center (TACC) for students’ clinical pastoral education.

Our key programs include:

- Weekly Sunday worship with Holy Eucharist in Woodruff Park
- Morning Prayer every Monday and Wednesday
- Bible study on Wednesdays
- Fellowship (Common Stories events, spiritual reflection and retreats)

- Common Soles Foot Clinic in the Park at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church and at the Gateway Center (indoors in winter)
- Pastoral care on the streets, and in hospitals, jails, and hospice centers
- Peer-to-peer pastoral care training that empowers members to help one another
- Theology from the Margins certificate program
- Occasional community service projects (Habitat for Humanity, Hunger Walk, and others)

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS



Church of the Common Ground is sustained by modest financial support, but given the abject need for spiritual sustenance on the streets of Atlanta, we continue to dream about possible growth and transformational ways to serve. Currently, we offer five main activities or events during the week at various locales in downtown Atlanta. Our Common Soles Foot Clinic is a distinctive, enriching experience for Christians and people of good will, and we would like to add one such service to the weekly calendar when additional volunteers can be recruited. Moreover, we would consider adding another Morning Prayer service at another strategic location in the downtown area. To ensure the safety of our parishioners, volunteers, clergy, and seminarians, we also seek to identify improved security processes, as our work is often surrounded by chaotic events reflective of life on the streets.

Of greater ambition is an initiative now in the planning stage. Perhaps the central challenge to our priests and seminarians (who engage personally, oftentimes in great depth, with our members) is the need to link some parishioners to nonprofit service agencies which provide a range of services—from health care to housing—while maintaining an appropriate pastoral care relationship. Providing help and connections to social services is labor intensive and typically takes weeks or months. This presents a constant personal and spiritual challenge for our vicar, assisting priests or deacons, and seminarians.

Only those who have worked closely with persons experiencing homelessness can fully appreciate the depth of their isolation, mistrust, and disconnectedness after spending years on the streets. These individuals must interact with a bureaucratic system designed to comply with a myriad of federal, state and local regulations, laid over a network of nonprofit service providers with their own rules, specialized programs, and criteria.

Because of this, CCG is leading the planning of a collaboration with eight nonprofit social service agencies. This collaboration is designed to forge a path to life off the streets for more persons experiencing homelessness in downtown Atlanta. The goal is to create an approach that will reach scale and promote greater effectiveness among existing programs aimed at reducing homelessness. To achieve scale, the project seeks to deploy a large, trained, and visible presence of volunteers downtown. We believe that churches will embrace the volunteer opportunities that this project offers to make a lasting and meaningful difference in the lives of their neighbors.

If this approach proves successful, we anticipate linking Common Ground church members to the volunteer navigators. We do not anticipate that this new initiative will require adding to our

staff or budget. We look forward to working with our new vicar to further conceptualize and implement this potentially impactful initiative.

## **WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR**

Based upon the insight and experience from our parishioners and staff, we understand that this work is hard and that only a special person who has a heart and passion for this type of ministry will be successful. A helping predisposition while able to hear many different perspectives and stories. A lover of Jesus who is a preacher of the gospel and promoter of our work to other parishes and civic oriented organizations. An infectious energy level to inspire worshippers and staff alike, and a dogged determination to persevere under trying conditions. Management skills sufficient to organize retreats and lead a staff, including volunteers. Our pastor must be a respected preacher and patient counselor, occasionally engaging deeply into congregant's lives while maintaining healthy boundaries that promote organizational sustainability, a healthy life-work balance, and time to engage in all aspects of the job. Accordingly, experience in this type of work is required.

## **APPENDIX**

- A. Vicar Job Description
- B. Diocesan Profile
- C. Financials
- D. Newsletters
- E. Website [www.churchofthecommonground.org](http://www.churchofthecommonground.org) To view a video, please click here: <https://www.churchofthecommonground.org/learn-about>

## **Position Description**

### **Title: Vicar, Church of the Common Ground Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta**

#### **Position Summary**

The Vicar of Church of the Common Ground (CCG) serves the members of a “church without walls” on the streets of Atlanta, providing pastoral care and spiritual formation opportunities for women and men who live on the margins of city life. As the principal pastor of the congregation, the Vicar is responsible for leading worship and liturgy; providing the sacraments; preparing programs for spiritual growth; and leading community outreach to prospective new members. The Vicar brings church activities close to the places where CCG members live—in parks, shelters, neighborhoods, jails, hospitals, and other public spaces.

As Vicar of a worshipping community in the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, this leader represents CCG in Diocesan activities; builds relationships to sustain the support and involvement of clergy and volunteers from Episcopal parishes throughout the Atlanta metro area; cultivates connections with organizations that provide services to our parishioners; initiates and monitors fundraising and strategies for financial sustainability; and provides administrative oversight of the CCG office and staff. The Vicar reports to the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta and works closely with the Bishop’s Advisory Committee.

#### **Essential Responsibilities of the Vicar**

Of the following essential responsibilities, we view the first two to be paramount:

1. **Worship Services. Plan and lead CCG’s worship services, preach the gospel, and administer the sacraments so that CCG parishioners have opportunities to respond to God’s calling in their lives, develop their relationship with Christ, and discern their gifts and responsibilities to serve others in community.** Our Sunday worship services are conducted outdoors at Woodruff Park in downtown Atlanta. On a weekly basis, we also conduct two Morning Prayer services, a Bible study service, and a non-medical foot clinic.
2. **Enhanced Pastoral Care. Provide an enhanced level of pastoral care to our parishioners so that their joys, anxieties, and needs are met with Christian concern and compassion.** Many of our parishioners have significant pastoral needs. We seek to serve them compassionately as we honor those who suffer the indignity of homelessness, poverty, racism, and social injustice. This often involves visiting parishioners in parks, jails, hospitals, personal care homes, and on the streets. We also seek to model and teach pastoral care principles to empower our parishioners to help one another.

3. **Relationships with Service Providers. Initiate and maintain positive working relationships with public and private service providers who share our interest in the well-being of the CCG population base.** Our relationships with organizations that provide direct services to our parishioners allow us to guide them to critically needed services. These include housing, medical, and other navigator-type services.
4. **Relationships with Parishes Throughout the Diocese. Enlist and motivate clergy, lay leaders, and parishioners from other parishes to serve as volunteers to assist with worship services, provide meals and transportation, donate clothing and other needs, and provide a ministry of presence and companionship to CCG members.** We seek to foster the bonds between our parishioners and those who worship in more traditional Episcopal parishes. This Christian fellowship with “housed” churches reinforces to our parishioners that they are seen and loved, not invisible and alone. Our Vicar will seek opportunities to preach and speak to churches and groups throughout the Diocese to raise support for the CCG ministry.
5. **Supervision of Staff. Supervise, inspire, and lead our staff clergy and administrative employees.** We seek to maintain a robust staff to assist the Vicar in his/her responsibilities. In addition, the Vicar will supervise a deacon and one to three interns/seminarians.
6. **Administrative Responsibilities. Provide leadership to successfully fulfill the administrative obligations of the ministry.** With the support of the administrative assistant, the Vicar will fulfill reporting and other responsibilities to the Diocese; work with the Bishop’s Advisory Committee to develop budgets and monitor the financial progress of the ministry; work with the chair of the Advisory Committee in planning for and conducting meetings; and supervise internal and external communications (such as the website, social media and outreach). The Vicar will also work with the Advisory Committee in the important function of fundraising, including the planning and implementation of fundraising campaigns.

In the performance of these responsibilities, we recognize that the Vicar will use her/his discretion to delegate specific functions to the Staff.

### **Strategic Initiative**

With the encouragement and support of the Diocese, the Bishop’s Committee has begun a strategic planning process. We are exploring ways for CCG to broaden its reach and be a catalyst for social change. One concept that we plan to explore is a partnership with organizations that provide social services directly to our parishioner base. This would allow us to provide our parishioners with an enhanced level of support in finding and obtaining needed services.

We look forward to sharing our deliberations with the new Vicar and to engaging her/his leadership, perspective, and experience as together we finalize a strategic plan.



## **Education/Experience**

- Ordination as a priest in the Episcopal Church and extensive pastoral care experience. Master of Divinity degree. Additional degrees or certifications in social work, pastoral care, or related experience are preferred.
- Combination of education, training, and experience that supports hands-on ministry on the streets of a major city.
- Demonstrated commitment to serving racially and economically diverse communities.
- Experience in providing compassionate pastoral care for individuals who struggle with financial and housing insecurity, mental health issues, and substance abuse recovery.

## **Knowledge & Skill Requirements**

- Excellent interpersonal communication skills, good judgment, and grounding in emotional intelligence.
- Skilled in independent decision-making and adherence to high ethical standards. Integrity in establishing relationship boundaries.
- Comfortable with the challenging conditions and risks of street ministry.
- Effective in engaging strategic partners; knowledge of church, nonprofit and service provider relationships and synergies.
- Demonstrated capacity for management of a team; skilled motivator.
- Strong problem-solving skills, flexibility to adapt to changing conditions.
- Good organizational and time management skills required to plan, organize, and implement multiple activities concurrently.

## **Working Conditions**

- Conducting outdoor services and “being on the streets”
- Maintaining church offices, together with the staff
- Pastoral care needs frequently occur outside of regular business hours
- Accessible to members by mobile phone
- Some travel to other parishes throughout the Diocese
- Frequent standing, lifting and other physical exertion

## **About Church of the Common Ground** ([www.churchofthecommonground.org](http://www.churchofthecommonground.org))

Church of the Common Ground (CCG) is a worshipping community and ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta. As a “church without walls”, we are affiliated with Ecclesia Ministries ([ecclesiaministriesmission.org](http://ecclesiaministriesmission.org)). Our mission is to be a church community on the streets of Atlanta, living the good news that we are all God’s beloved.

We are a church without walls on the streets of Atlanta, providing support for the pastoral and spiritual needs of women and men who live on the margins of our city. Many of our parishioners struggle with chronic physical or mental illnesses, lack of housing and employment, fractured families, fragile recovery from substance abuse, inability to access resources, and declining social support. We grow in the awareness that God has given gifts to each of us, and that God calls us to use those gifts to serve one another and to minister to the needs of the world. CCG parishioners find Church of the Common Ground pastoral care near to where they live—in neighborhoods, shelters, parks, jails, hospitals, and other public spaces.

Due to the nature of our ministry, it is somewhat difficult to quantify our parishioner base. We view our core congregation to be between 40 to 60 people. Our overall reach is much greater as a result of our reputation and presence on the streets.

Key programs include weekly Sunday worship with Holy Eucharist, Morning Prayer, healing services, Bible Study, and the Common Soles Foot Clinic. CCG also provides opportunities for volunteer service in the community and access to spiritual formation and growth retreats that promote a closer relationship with God and improved mental wellbeing.

The CCG Staff currently consists of (a) an Assistant Priest, (b) a (unpaid) Deacon, (c) an Administrative Assistant and (d) a Ministry Coordinator, all in part-time positions, and two to three intern / seminarians.

The ministry maintains close connections to and collaboration with Episcopal parishes and volunteers throughout the Diocese, from urban and suburban communities alike. Hundreds of Episcopalians—and volunteers from other denominations—attend CCG worship, bring lunches and encouragement, provide pastoral care and event assistance, donate in-kind goods, and provide financial support.

CCG is supported by the Bishop’s Advisory Committee, consisting of both Clergy and lay volunteers. The Committee meets regularly, and the Vicar is a voting member. CCG maintains offices at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Downtown Atlanta (approximately one mile from our service locations).

***“God is here, God is right here with us, and this is Holy Ground!”***

--Call to Sunday Worship  
Church of the Common Ground

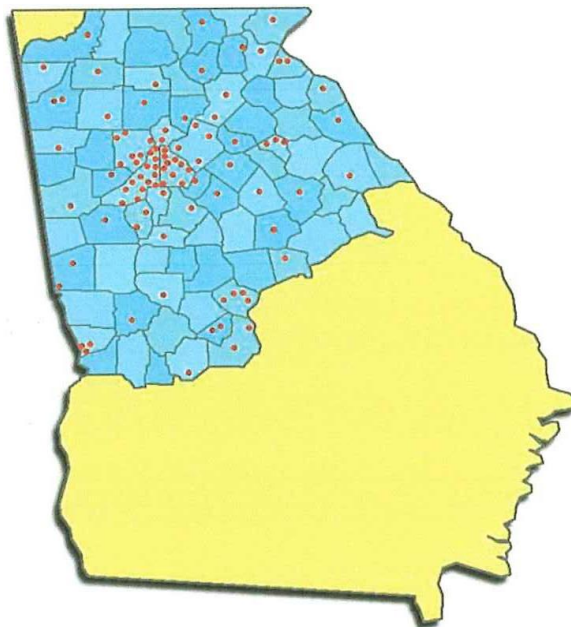
## Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta Information (updated August 2019)

The Diocese of Atlanta is a vibrant, diverse and expansive faith community, with 117 different communities focused on worshipping a living and loving God and working for a better world in the name of Jesus Christ. There are some 50,000 members in nearly 25,000 households in the 11 convocations that make up the diocese.

Our Diocesan Purpose Statement, adopted at Annual Council 2015, informs all aspects of our common life: *"We challenge ourselves and the world to love like Jesus as we worship joyfully, serve compassionately, and grow spiritually."*

We are a Christian community blessed with vibrance, variety and vitality. Our diocesan bishop is The Right Reverend Robert C. Wright, who was elected by the diocese in June 2012 and then ordained and consecrated Oct. 13, 2012. The Right Reverend Don A. Wimberly assists Bishop Wright in visitations.

The Offices of the Bishop are at the Cathedral of St. Philip in Atlanta. We have more than 200 clergy who are under Bishop Wright's oversight, and nearly as many who come from other dioceses, plus an abundant supply of lay ministers.



The Diocese of Atlanta was created in 1907 and carved from the Diocese of Georgia. The oldest church in the diocese is Christ Church in Macon, which was organized in 1825. The newest are Christ the King, Lilburn, and St. Benedict's, Smyrna, organized in 2005 and 2006, respectively.

As part of The Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Atlanta is connected to the worldwide

Anglican Communion of 70 million people in 38 provinces. We engage in special companion relationships with several dioceses in Africa and South America. The Diocese of Atlanta actively supports the ministry of The Episcopal Church and its presiding bishop, the Most Reverend Michael Curry.

The Diocese of Atlanta's website is [www.episcopalatlanta.org](http://www.episcopalatlanta.org). Follow us, and Bishop Robert Wright, on social media.