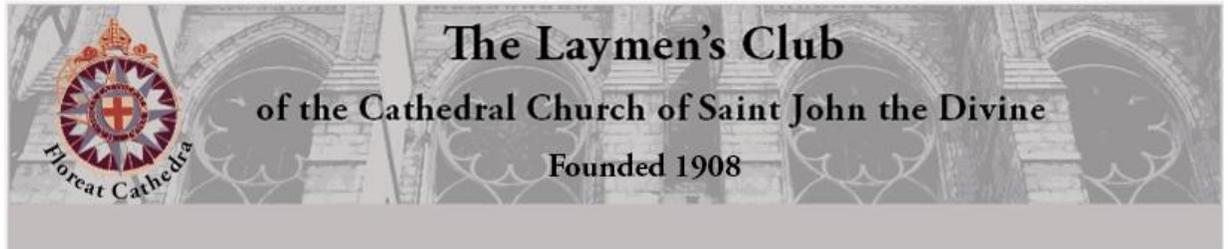




The Cathedral  
Church of **Saint John**  
**the Divine**

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In 2008 The Laymen's Club celebrated 100 years of commitment to the vision and vitality of The Cathedral of St. John the Divine. It is important to acknowledge the contributions of those who have helped make the Cathedral a treasured sanctuary, and who continue to build upon a record of accomplishment to insure the Cathedral's readiness to serve the people of the City, the Diocese and the world in the 21st century.

It was a committee of laymen who took the initiative for an Episcopal cathedral in New York City in 1872 by suggesting to Stephen P. Nash, clerk of the vestry of Trinity Parish, that he present a proposal for a cathedral to Bishop Horatio Potter.

In the early years of the cathedral project, it seems mainly to have been kept alive by laymen. This was acknowledged by Bishop Potter, who publicly emphasized the central role of the laity in promoting not only the program for a cathedral, but also in advancing the general work of the Episcopal Church through associations, clubs and guilds. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that the first people to propose a laymen's club for the Cathedral were not laypersons, but clergy, who wisely saw the need for a lay group dedicated to the support of Cathedral activities. Bishop Henry Codman Potter was sympathetic to their proposal, and David Hummell Greer, who had been elected bishop coadjutor in 1903, seconded him. The Laymen's Club was formally established on March 23, 1908.

The functions of The Laymen's Club grew in the early years, expanding beyond providing a corps of ushers to encompass the whole of the early publishing activities of the Cathedral, producing the guidebooks, postcards and pamphlets sold at the Cathedral. As the cathedral rose, members gave tours, or "pilgrimages," about the Cathedral, and reached out into the community giving lectures and "magic lantern" presentations about the Cathedral and its progress. As part of the first great fundraising campaign under Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the 1920s, The Laymen's Club took on the project of funding the floor of the Cathedral, the magnificent "Pilgrim's Pavement," covering the nave in green Vermont slate, Belgian black marble and ornamental bronze medallions. Its dedication in 1934 was heralded by an anthem composed by the famed British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams.

When the Cathedral saw the need to expand its gift shop, it was The Laymen's Club that funded the transformation of the then-vacant North Transept space into the Cathedral Shop, tragically lost in the 2001 fire. More than money, the members organized squads to clean and paint the space and set up the first display cases. For many years the Club sponsored a Saturday group of volunteer cleaners, "The



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Holy Dusters," under the redoubtable Violet Drakes (of blessed memory), who roamed the vastness of the Cathedral helping to keep the dust at bay. Over the years, Laymen's Club members became the historians of the Cathedral, sponsoring lectures on Cathedral arts and architecture, including the annual Edward Nason West lecture on Christian art. The Laymen's Club published sixteen editions of "A Guide to The Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine," the first appearing in 1920. The Club also provided seed money for the Emergency Food Pantry, now operated by Cathedral Community Cares, and funded the transformation of its former clubrooms in the Ithiel Town building to provide the first homeless shelter at the Cathedral. The Club's contributions to Cathedral building and maintenance are many, including the Compass Rose Medallion in the Great Choir - the symbol of the worldwide Anglican Communion - a memorial to its designer The Rev. Canon Edward N. West, the beloved sub-Dean of the Cathedral; the "Pilgrims' Frieze" over the Great Bronze Doors depicting pilgrims of all races and nations; and a substantial contribution to the refurbishment of the historic Ithiel Town Building, connected to the Cathedral on the south.

To mark its centennial, the Club has been proud to pay to refurbish the Cross of New York (its gift in honor of Bishop Manning), to donate a set of silver communion wafer bowls and to fund a new pamphlet on The Pilgrims' Pavement. It also commissioned the late Lee Hoiby, dean of American choral composers, to write an anthem for the re-dedication, and will be publishing its own centennial history by noted New York social historian Frank Sypher. It published *Strangers & Pilgrims: A Centennial History of The Laymen's Club of the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine* also by Frank Sypher. You may order *Strangers & Pilgrims* online with this link.

The Laymen's Club draws its members, men and women, from far and wide. They are a body of "strangers and pilgrims" who have come together to find a shared sense of awe and purpose in the Cathedral. While some in the church lament the lack of focus on lay vocation, the members of The Laymen's Club have never lacked for direction and inspiration in responding to the challenge of the Cathedral. The next hundred years can hardly be less rewarding.