His Valentine’s Day, the Cathedral launched The Value of Sanctuary: Building a House Without Walls, the latest in a series of Cathedral-wide art exhibitions. Visitors from far and wide celebrated this day of love by exploring the exhibition’s themes of sanctuary, which ground the artwork in our current political moment and the Cathedral’s long history as a place of welcome. As part of the opening festivities, visitors wrote Valentines to loved ones and children currently detained at the U.S.-Mexico border, echoing the words of the Most Reverend Michael Bruce Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, “When love is the way, the earth will be a sanctuary.”

Unlike conventional exhibition spaces, the Cathedral presents a unique opportunity to place art in conversation with its architecture and history. When planning The Value of Sanctuary, lead curator Isadora Wilkenfeld, together with Cathedral staff, clergy, and colleagues, considered the many audiences who find a home in the Cathedral and embraced ways to highlight the fabric of the building. The exhibition features works by over thirty artists alongside selections from the Cathedral Collection, archival materials, and visitor response areas. A series of accompanying programs are listed on the Cathedral’s website.

We sat down with some of the artists to hear their reflections on their work, The Value of Sanctuary, and its significance for the Cathedral as a sanctuary space. Check the Cathedral’s blog to “Meet the Artists” and read their complete interviews throughout the course of the exhibition.

“I am hoping people will look at the work with compassion and love, that they will forget our differences and see the refugees as people—as children without a home, vulnerable and scared.” — Rania Matar

“Standing in the Cathedral on my first visit, I thought about how shelter and sanctuary overlap, I thought of all the people worldwide who are seeking shelter in tents and makeshift quarters. I asked myself how I might create a conversation between those fragile, temporary living situations and the (relatively) permanent stone edifice of St. John the Divine. I was immediately drawn to the carved but uninstalled stones in the back yard—feeling that they might create a metaphorical bridge between these seeming opposites. What I realized along the way is whether cathedral or tent, both are shelters for the soul as well as the physical body, and that it can be hard to have one without the other. … I’ve never created a work for a place of worship and it feels like my work is connecting with a whole new community, as well as a lineage of art in service of thoughtfulness and contemplation.” — Adam Kuby

(Continued on page 3)
Dean’s Meditation

Charles Laughton made everything seem so simple in the 1939 film The Hunchback of Notre Dame when he stood on the parapet of Notre Dame and applied the platonic vision to fit the image of a human society. The Biblical record is littered with accounts of refuge seeking for various reasons, among them exile (Amos and Eze, in Gen. 32), mass migration (Exodus and Song in Gen. 125), religious persecution (Lukas in Genesis 170) and deportation (described in 1 Peter, 3:17), and ethnic oppression (Joseph and Mary in Matthew 2:4; Ayala and Priscilla in Acts 18). The concept of sanctuary has also grown in complexity. The concept of sanctuary is the gift of basic human rights and the freedom to live, in a community with dignity and safety. When we talk about sanctuary, we describe an international community of people who respect and trust one another, bound together at the speed of light through our shared humanity. As the need for sanctuary has grown and evolved with our changing cultures and communities, other types of refuge have emerged: electronic sanctuary, legal sanctuary, medical sanctuary, legal sanctuary, intellectual sanctuary, spiritual sanctuary. The concept of sanctuary has expanded to the notion of establishing a culture that does not force assimilation but embraces and celebrates difference.

The expansion of definitions and concepts begs an important question: How do we understand sanctuary and seek to incorporate the concepts that underlie it in our own lives and communities? A modern concept of sanctuary certainly includes basic physical safety and freedom from fear and want. In Christian doctrine, the concept of sanctuary is related to upholding the dignity of every human being and creating a sacred commonwealth committed to an active willingness to be the reconciling agents in a world divided. It is a demand for equal justice for all, an insistence on the equitable sharing of wealth, and a profound witness to the stranger, the foreigner, the other, and those most different from ourselves.

Sanctuary becomes the core of the Beloved Community—not an organization of individuals but a new adventure of men and women navigating a new order, a new communion of those who refuse to ask the question “where will I get to find the comfort of the life that the god of all is the passion of each?” (its Divine Female?); that is the Christian vision of sanctuary as I understand it.

This Cathedral’s founding purpose, continuing over 125 years of service, is to be a house of prayer and a safe place for all. This Cathedral and its life is built on the cornerstones of worship, hospitality and prayer, in order that all who come here may know and feel that they are safe, loved, and at home in the community of this great sanctuary.

This Cathedral provides a safe haven in which children can learn and grow through ACT (Advancing the Community of Tomorrow) and through the renowned Cathedral School. This Cathedral, to effect its founding purpose, provides outreach through CCC (Cathedral Community Care), the program that oversees the Sunday soup kitchen and clothing closet. This Cathedral is a partner in the arts, uplifting the highest standards of music performance and celebrating the literary arts through the American Poets Corner. All of this is understood within the context of Christian formation, active spirituality, and regular worship and preaching in the Anglican tradition.

As part of these programs and happenings at the Cathedral’s core is the mission to create and expanding sanctuary.

Over the past five years the Diocese of Rhode Island’s Cathedral Church of a Sanctuary. For the Love of the Divine that is a service of creation in community. A faith-based sanctuary, a retreat for making a community of safety, is the fruit of that divine energy.

I hope you enjoy, learn, and grow through this visit To the Value of Sanctuary. I wish you to receive this as your own and in helping create sanctuary for all. One way to do that is to come and be welcomed into the life of the community of the Cathedral and to join the work as we strive to build the Beloved Community.

This essay was adapted from the Dean’s message in the catalog for the spring 2019 special exhibition, Building a House Without Walls, available at the Cathedral Visitor Center.

The American Poets Corner: e. e. cummings

love is a place & through this place of love move (with brightness of peace) all places is a yes & in this world of yes lives (skullly curled) all worlds

e. e. cummings was inducted into the American Poets Corner in 1997.

The Value of Sanctuary: Meet the Artists

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“The Cathedral is a house for the arts. The cathedral is a patron of the arts, and members of the community who come here may know and feel that their unique gifts are cherished and honored,” explained Bishop Andrew M. Dietsche.

By Subway:

Morning Prayer 10:30 am
Holy Eucharist 11 am
Morning Eucharist 6 am
Evening Prayer 8 am

Morning Prayer 11:30 am
Holy Eucharist 12 pm
Morning Eucharist 6 pm
Evening Prayer 8 pm

Holy Week was held with a three-day retreat called Trinity Week, Good Friday, Saturday and Sunday. During the Holy Week activities begin at 11 am every day and the services take place from 9 am to 9 pm. The activities include a variety of services, including the Daily Office, Choral Evensong, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Holy Eucharist.

On Saturday, the Cathedral was decorated and cleaned. Easter Sunday begins at 9 am, and the liturgy begins with the lighting of a fire in the darkness and the reciting of the entire story of Jesus’s actions in history according to Jewish and Christian tradition. The services continue to baptisms and the first Eucharist of Easter.

On Sunday, between 11 am and 1 pm, for the Easter Feast, the Cathedral is full of celebrating hymns and prayers. The theme was “The Resurrection of the Body,” as part of the Easter observance.

People are encouraged to come to the Cathedral and participate in the services, which include the Easter Vigil, the Easter Vigil Service, and the Easter Sunday Service. The Cathedral also hosts a number of events, including the Easter Sunday Faire, which features a variety of performances, including live music, dance, and theater. The Cathedral is open to the public and welcomes all visitors.

The Value of Sanctuary:

The Value of Sanctuary is a concept that has been discussed in various religions and cultures throughout history. Sanctuary is defined as a special place or area where people can feel safe and protected from harm. This concept is important in many different settings, including religious sites, community centers, and parks. In each of these places, sanctuary is an important aspect of creating a welcoming and supportive environment for all who enter.

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Spring is a busy, joyful time at the Cathedral. This season we witness the great mysteries of Holy Week, when the narratives of our Gardenสนามบนพื้น is presented over three days of intense drama of love, death, and resurrection. On the Sunday before Easter, the Church celebrates thePaschal Vigil, where we gather to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Following the Liturgy of the Eucharist, people gather outside the Church to light candles and to witness the renewal of baptismal vows. The Easter season is a celebration of new life and hope, as we look forward to the promise of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Blowing of the Bicycles, a May Day tradition at the Cathedral, celebrates the opening of the warm weather and the beginning of the growing season. The event is a symbol of the renewal of life and the promise of a new beginning.

The Cathedral Invites You to Take a Pause to Consider Nature as Sanctuary

The Peace Tree has been part of Cathedral life since the 1980s. In recent decades Catherine Skopic, a Cathedral volunteer and member of the Congregation of Saint Sacrement, has taken the lead in decorating the monumental peace tree. This year, the Peace Tree is dedicated in a Cathedral School service focused on world issues, diversity, and global understanding.

This year, School Director Tobias Miller (10) thought of a way to capture the behind-the-scenes process for the world to see. Using a special camera system planted in the tradition, an upper level of the Cathedral, Tobias created a short timelapse video that shows Catherine or upper level of the Cathedral, Tobias created a short timelapse video that shows Catherine decorating the Peace Tree from top to bottom. The Cathedral Staff sat down with Tobias to learn more about the project.

Tobias’ video and a detailed history of the Peace Tree can be found on our website, stjohnndivine.org.
At their farthest reach, these programs have influenced world neighborhoods and the city as a whole. The pebble that he dropped into the pond has spread far and wide, to great effect. Programs initiated in the 70s and 80s have reached the whole city, the nation and the world. Like the impulse sent out by a pebble dropped into a pond, the influence has gone out from the Cathedral to reach millions. At home, however, the Cathedral seems a little like an empty nest. UHAB and Homes for the Homeless have long since moved to larger quarters, and a harsh economic climate has forced the Cathedral to sever its relationship with Cathedral Stoneworks (which administered the Apprentice program) and to close Senior Outreach. New, the highly regarded Manhattan Valley Youth Program operates in a largely independent fashion. Only perennially necessary community programs like ACT, the Cathedral’s widely admired daycare and camp organization, and the Shelter and Soup Kitchen (that still feeds 400) continue to thrive in their original form.

It is time to drop a new pebble. “In the past, we have often responded to crises one at a time,” says The Rev. Canon Joel Gibson, Subdean of the Cathedral. “Our programs have worked very hard and successfully to help the elderly or children or the homeless. Today we need to integrate our community work, so that we can be effective across age, economic and class lines.”

“When we maintain a presence across age lines, seniors can meet and seek to heal the broken community. One special role of a church is to meditate. “The Cathedral has to be a truly safe place,” says Golliher, “a place where people can meet and seek to heal the broken community.”

The Rev. Canon Aislinn Brooks holds a “house church” with the Latorre and Orze families in a Manhattan Valley home. Photo: Cathedral Archives

This excerpt comes from an article first published in the Cathedral's Spring 1995 newsletter, the year that Cathedral Community Cares was founded to strengthen existing social outreach programs at the Cathedral. The article was written by William Bryan Logan, then the Cathedral’s Director of Communications and Writer in Residence.

For almost three decades—ever since Bishop Horace Donegan directed the Cathedral to assist in the rebuilding of Harlem in 1968—the Cathedral has sought to help renew its surrounding neighborhoods and the city as a whole. The pebble that he dropped into the pond has spread far and wide, to great effect. Pioneering programs like the Urban Homesteading assistance Board (UHAB), Homes for the Homeless, the Stoneyard Institute’s Apprenticeship Program, the National AIDS Memorial, the Manhattan Valley Youth organization, Senior Outreach, the National Religious Partnership for the Environment and the Upper West Side Recycling Center all were incubated at the Cathedral.

At their farthest reach, these programs have influenced world leaders at the Earth Summit in Rio, and at a series of top-level meetings at Oxford, England, at Moscow and at Kyoto, which called on the likes of Mikhail Gorbachev, Mother Theresa and the Dalai Lama.

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Now, with planning afoot to create Cathedral Community Cares—a new integrated outreach program that will actively respond to the community’s expressed needs—the pebble is about to drop.

Cathedral Community Cares will have much to do with building a sustainable and whole community. Seniors may help with daycares; the homeless may shop for the seniors; youth trainees will run a recycling center that serves the neighborhood institutions; volunteers from Columbia and the congregation may teach English to Latino immigrants and service as mentors to shelter residents seeking to reenter society. “The whole thing is about comprehensive and integrated services,” says Stephen Facey, Vice President for Planning and Special Projects.

“We have to replace what was scattered with a consolidated, balanced approach to outreach.”

To do so requires a renewed and honest vision of what the community is and how the church relates to it. “It’s not that we have no relationship to the community,” says The Rev. Jeffrey Golliher, coordinator of the Cathedral’s Rene Dubos Consortium. “But our current relationship is piecemeal and incomplete. Our job is to re-weave the community as a possible whole. We don’t want ‘virtual’ community. We want a sacramental, a flesh-and-blood community.”

Practically, this new pebble requires communication, commitment and consistency. Building on efforts that have shown these qualities, Canon Gibson has gathered a team to help envision Cathedral Community Cares as a network that will involve the Cathedral as a participant and catalyst. “In this vision,” he says, “everyone has a value to the community, not only the so-called providers of help, but the homeless man, the person with AIDS, the old woman.”

At the same time, Dean Morton has begun a practical push to unite the leaders of more than a dozen institutions in this community to create together a model ecological neighborhood that will integrate work on human society with a right relationship to the earth. “We have to learn to listen,” he says, “and to use the full and extraordinary resources of our community to bring about real, tangible change.”

One special role of a church is to meditate. “The Cathedral has to be a truly safe place,” says Golliher, “a place where people can meet and seek to heal the broken community. And to do so, we must also heal our relationship to the earth.”