



St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church

604 Johnson Street

New Bern, North Carolina

This Presentation developed for Christ Episcopal Church May 1, 2022 Adult Forum by the St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee is led by St Cyprian's Sr. Warden Shirley Guion with support from Jr. Warden Angelyn Dixon, Harry Gormley, Parishioner of Christ Episcopal Church, the Reverend Margaret Pollock who serves the East Carolina Diocese worshipers and Carrie Gallagher, Nonprofit Consultant and Executive Director of the African American Heritage and Culture Center.

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The History of St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church of New Bern

St. Cyprian's is a remarkable church in a city of churches. Born of the congregants of Christ Episcopal Church in New Bern NC, St. Cyprian's is now one of twenty historically black churches in North Carolina.

St. Cyprian's Founding Congregation As early as 1826, residents of color in New Bern received instruction in catechism and lectures on scriptures¹. By 1845 a congregation of people of color had been formed, becoming orderly and continuous by 1866. Following the Civil War, the 1866 Diocesan Convention noted their transfer from Christ Church to St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church. The leadership of The Reverend Edward E. Forbes was an early driving force for St. Cyprian's. In his bequest, funds were left to assist St. Cyprian's and establish a scholarship fund for diocesan ministerial students at St. Augustine School near Raleigh.

St. Cyprian's as part of New Bern's Historic Architecture St. Cyprian's was originally a wood framed building that once served as the home of First Baptist Church. In 1910, construction of a new brick church started and in January 1912, the members of St. Cyprian's were worshipping in their new church. In the 1980's St. Cyprian's Church was renovated and restored with assistance from the New Bern historical Society and the Kellenberger Historic Foundation. With reduced congregants in the early 2000's, St. Cyprian's experienced irregular maintenance, but was cared for by volunteers and its congregants with support from the community and congregants of Christ Church. St. Cyprian's was greatly impacted when New Bern was hit by Hurricane Florence in September 2018. Insurance, FEMA disaster assistance and contributed support covered repair of the roof and repointing the exterior brick and more. Water damage affected the worship space and the undercroft lower level community meeting space and offices. Plaster walls were removed, replaced, and repainted. Wood floors were repaired and refinished. Damaged church carpet was replaced. As of this writing, the HVAC is scheduled for replacement.

¹ Crown of Life, History of Christ Church New Bern NC, Gertrude S. Carraway

St. Cyprian's leadership during & after "The Great Fire" of 1922 On December 1, 1922 New Bern experienced a disastrous fire, the worst fire in the history of North Carolina. It burned over 40 blocks, consumed 1,000 buildings and left 3,200 residents homeless. 90% of those left homeless were black. While a nearby church, St. Peter's AME Zion church and homes opposite St. Cyprian's were burned to the ground, St. Cyprian's survived. Under the direction of Dr. Joseph Latham, a New Bern Physician and with the assistance of Nurse Charlotte Rhone, St. Cyprian's served as an emergency hospital for black victims who were not allowed care at the local hospital. Subsequently, the Good Shepherd Hospital was opened in 1938 to serve the black people of the community – it was the only hospital serving black people in an eighty mile radius. St. Cyprian's pastor, The Reverend R. I. Johnson served as the hospital's manager and chief organizer. With an impeccable reputation for service in the community and the diocese he led special community programs to address the high level of racial tension during this time.

St. Cyprian's leadership in the community In the mid-century decades, Men of the congregation reactivated the Brotherhood of St. Andrews. St. Cyprian's expanded to the High Church tradition. Church leadership sponsored a scouting movement with Cub Packs, Boy Scouts and Explorer Scouts. During the 1980's the church moved to use of a Free Standing Altar, the Tabernacle, and the Reserved Sacraments. The congregants and church leadership became active participants in a variety of community, diocesan and ecumenical programs. These included the launch of Religious Community Services (RCS) to support those in need, engagement in the Coalition of Black Episcopalians, and participation in the LARC Conference. St. Cyprian's was the first church serving the black community to be included in the historical tours of New Bern.

The early 2000's were times of change for St. Cyprian's. Its younger generation moved from the area when their new families were formed. Aging congregants were less able to participate in services and activities in the greater community. During certain intervals, when no priest was assigned, services of the church were conducted by 'supply priests' or Sub-Deacons. Morning Prayer was regularly conducted by parishioners. The reduction of parishioners and the related reduction of income affected the operation and maintenance of St. Cyprian's. The impact of Hurricane Florence affected more than the physical church. The opportunity for St. Cyprian's to continue as a center for community events and celebrations has been affected. The opportunity for St. Cyprian's to engage the greater, diverse community is affected.

What is the vision for St. Cyprian's? It is for St. Cyprian's to once again serve its parishioners and the community. It must be secured, repaired and brought into ADA compliance. It will be a functioning worship space for the Episcopal community. St. Cyprian's will support and host community events. It will welcome visitors to learn the history of St. Cyprian's and its remarkable impact on New Bern's African American Heritage. St. Cyprian's leadership and members, parishioners of Christ Church, residents of New Bern and the entire Diocese share this vision.



St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church of New Bern

Pastoral Leadership

The following individuals are identified in historical records as pastoral leaders of St. Cyprian's Church:

- The Reverend H. A. Skinner, 1867 - 1880
- The Reverend Peter Cassey², 1880 – 1894
- The Reverend George Miller, 1895 — 1896.
- The Reverend George Avant, 1898 — 1907.
- The Reverend J. Taylor, 1907 — 1913.
- The Reverend S. A. Morgan, 1915 1916.
- The Reverend R. I. Johnson, 1918 — 1946.
- The Reverend W. A. Wilkins, 1948 — 1952.
- The Reverend Francis G. Johnson, 1953 — 1960.
- The Reverend Aldophus Carty³ 1963 — 1969.
- The Reverend Leslie W. Hewitt, 1969 — 1982
- The Reverend Marion S. Poitier, 1982 — 1988
- The Reverend Thomas C. Noe 1988 -- 1989.
- The Reverend William Hadden III , 1990 —2000
- Deacon R.C. West, 2002 — 2003.
- 2004 - 2007⁴
- The Reverend Lynn C. Peterman, 2007 — 2009
- The Reverend Patricia Thomas, 2009 – 2017
- 2017 to present day⁵

² It is shown that The Reverend Peter Cassey was the first black priest to serve St. Cyprian's

³ The Reverend Aldophus Carty was of British heritage and constituted the first break of Black priests since 1880 to serve St. Cyprian's as pastor.

⁴ In September of 2004 a Covenant for ministry and mission between Christ Church, New Bern, NC and St. Cyprian's Church was implemented with the clergies of Christ Church; the clergies being the Reverend Canon Dr. Peter B. Stube, the Reverend Mary Frances Curns and the Reverend Jeremy M. Warrick who served as-Vicar of **St. Cyprian's Church**. During certain intervals when no priest was assigned, services of the church were conducted by supply priests or Sub-Deacon, C.C. Stewart, Sr. and Lay Reader, Dr. S.D. Bryan.

⁵ With the departure of The Reverend Peterman, St. Cyprian's has relied on The Reverend Paul Canady and The Reverend Courtney Dale & supply clergy.