



“The fanatical supporters of republican government go there on pilgrimages as to the tomb of their apostle.”

Marquis de Barbe, head of the French Mission, on Judge Dixwell's tombstone (1779)

Even when the crypt isn't open, you can still visit both tombstones (the original, and the more impressive one placed in 1849) marking the burial site of **John Dixwell** behind our church. You'll also find memorial plaques for **Judges Whalley and Goffe**, the other two English “regicides” who fled to New Haven to escape execution orders by the Crown. Nearby is a cenotaph (empty tomb) in honor of **Theophilus Eaton** and a large marble plaque installed by the city in 1821 when the last of the stones on the Green were removed to Grove Street Cemetery.



“Our meeting house is not a museum or a work of art, simply to be enjoyed or admired. The church will have a much wider outreach in the community if its function is not only to serve as a place of worship on Sundays, but as a true *Meeting House*, a place where citizens can gather to discuss important matters or to celebrate great events. Such was long one of the purposes this building served, and to restore it is an end much to be desired.”

Dr. Edmund Ware Sinnott, on the vision for Center's earlier renovation campaign (1960)

An historic urban church...with a present and a future.

Center Church lives on as a remarkably diverse, **open and affirming** member congregation of the **United Church of Christ** and remains a vital presence in the civic life of New Haven. As a service to the community, our meeting house is host year round to concerts, civic meetings, and public events by local and national organizations. Our grand old **Parish House** at **311 Temple Street** was thoroughly renovated in 2014-2016 for broader use and accessibility. As well as containing our church offices, this building is shared all week with a wide range of community groups maximizing our downtown location and flexible spaces (including a small chapel and **Pratt Hall**, a full ballroom). We are especially proud to host the **Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen**, a secular, independent non-profit that prepares and serves hot meals on site for hundreds of guests. Our congregation voted in 2007 to make DESK a permanent home in our Parish House basement and in 2014 to completely renovate this area.



CENTER CHURCH'S MEETING HOUSE: A SELF-GUIDED TOUR



The **Davenport Window**—a Tiffany piece donated by the Trowbridge family in 1894—depicts the Reverend John Davenport's first sermon in April of 1638, delivered under an oak tree on the Sabbath shortly after he and his fellow settlers landed in what was to become the New Haven Colony. Davenport and his Puritan followers arrived with the dream of founding a theocratic “New Jerusalem.”

The candelabra symbolizes the “**Seven Pillars**” elected from the male population to rule the early church and colony along with Davenport. Colony Governor **Theophilus Eaton** is depicted in the foreground leaning against a rifle—an extraordinarily rare sight in a church window. As a condition of purchase of their land, the agrarian **Quinnipiac** tribe already settled in the area required these newcomers to join them in a mutual defensive alliance against occasional raids by the Pequot and Mohawk tribes to the north.



God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



JOIN US SUNDAYS AT 10:00 AM

203-787-0121

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The first “meeting house” of First Church of Christ, New Haven (now also known as Center Church on the Green) was built in 1639. The building you are standing in today is the fourth, completed in 1814. In earlier days—particularly after the official separation of church and state in

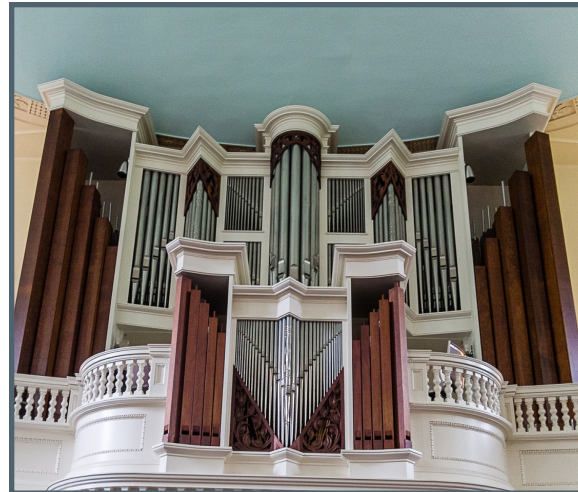
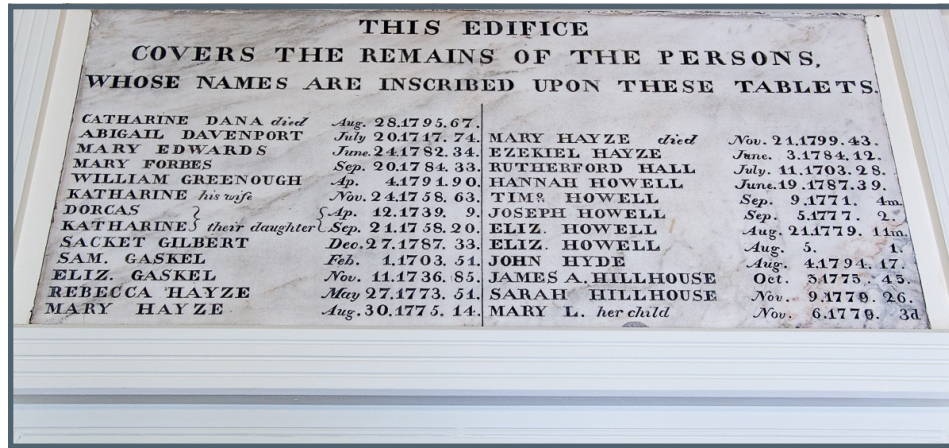
Connecticut in 1818—congregations maintained these buildings in part by renting out floor pews to families, with the most expensive ones at the very front. On **pew #63** you’ll find the brass name plate for **Eli Whitney**, inventor of the cotton gin. **Yale** held their commencements here until 1895. Yale’s modern day commencement processions still detour to circle around Center Church while our bells ring in celebration.



Plaques commemorating the earliest ministers of the church line the sanctuary walls. One nationally prominent leader was the **Reverend Leonard Bacon**. In 1825—a few days before his installation at Center at the age of 23—Bacon witnessed the last slave auction in New Haven as he stood on the meeting house steps. He was so profoundly disturbed that he authored a collection of anti-slavery writings which influenced President Lincoln. When the African leaders of the hijacked slave ship **Amistad** were held and prosecuted in New Haven in 1839, Bacon led Center’s efforts to provide assistance to those on trial. Today, Center Church’s **Ladies Home Missionary Society** and **Christian Outreach Committee** offer gifts of support to select charitable programs each year—in New Haven and beyond.

“If that form of government, that system of social order is not wrong — if those laws of the Southern States, by virtue of which slavery exists there, and is what it is , are not wrong — nothing is wrong.”

*Rev. Leonard Bacon,
Minister of Center Church
from 1825 to 1866.*



Until the mid 19th century, hymns at Center Church were accompanied by a chorister and later, a wind and string ensemble; an **organ** was seen as too “papist” for worship rooted in the Puritan tradition. However, so many members enjoyed opportunities to listen to the organ at the Episcopal church next door that leadership relented and installed our first organ in 1855 (the one behind you is our third). Famed American composer **Charles Ives** worked here as an organist during his school days at Yale, and Center Church still sponsors a Charles Ives Organ Scholar at Yale’s School of Music each Spring. **Sacred music remains one of the defining ministries of Center Church:** you’ll find each of our Sunday morning services accompanied by a professional choir during the academic year.

Until the early 1800’s, the upper **New Haven Green** (behind where the three churches currently sit) was used as a burial ground. An estimated 5,000-8,000 people are interred here, though the last of the tombstones outside of our crypt were removed to **Grove Street Cemetery** in 1821. When

Center’s current meeting house location was proposed in 1812, it was decided to construct the church over the portion of the burying ground within the building’s new footprint without disturb those graves. **Our one-of-a-kind basement crypt** has preserved not just the tombstones themselves, but also an incredible snapshot of the original colonial Green. Today, the **New Haven Crypt Association** concerns itself with the job of stewardship and preservation of the site, and interested church members and others volunteer to be trained as tour guides. (**Public tours** are available most Saturdays from April to October, from 11am to 1pm.)

