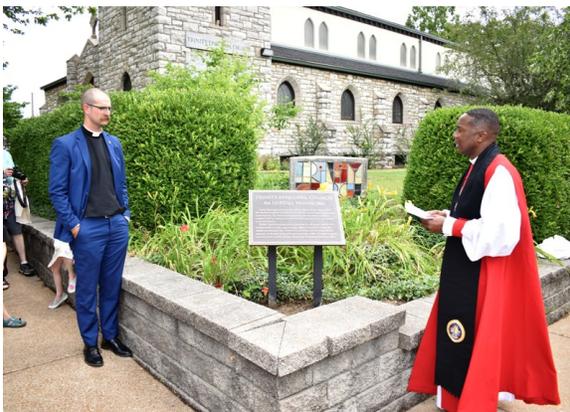

A History of Trinity's LGBTQ+ Women

Introduction

My name is Krista Osborne, and I have been a corps member at Deaconess Anne House for the years 2021 and 2022. Deaconess Anne House (DAH) is a program of the Episcopal Service Corps (ESC). It began in 2013, and was founded and directed by the Rev. Jon Stratton for the first three years. My year, the 2021-2022 year, is DAH's ninth cohort. DAH has had a relationship with Trinity Episcopal Church for a while. The current rector at Trinity, the Very Rev. Jon Stratton, was DAH's founding director and worked at that position until he was called to Trinity. DAH's current director, the Rev. Michaelene Miller, is a member of Trinity's worship team and often preaches at Trinity on Sundays. This year, that relationship has become especially close. Trinity has been the primary host congregation for the 9.0 DAH corps members, and we attend church at Trinity most Sundays. Since February, that relationship has become even closer, as I began to work at Trinity as my ESC placement site. I've been working on digitizing the archives, and I've been working on this history project about the queer women and lesbians of Trinity.

Father Jon Stratton stands by as Bishop Deon Johnson blesses Trinity's NRHP plaque.



Source: "CWE's Trinity Episcopal Church Celebrates Historic LGBTQIA+ Honor," *#Boom*, June 26 2021,

<http://www.boom.lgbt/cwe-s-trinity-episcopal-church-celebrates-historic-lgbtqia-honor>.

This project was started because of an initiative that took place several years ago, starting in 2018. Trinity Episcopal Church has had a significant impact on the LGBTQ+ community in St. Louis, and several members of the congregation sought to have that recognized through the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Katie Batza, Professor of Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies at the University of Kansas, wrote the application, with help from Michelle Diedrich from the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office. Members of the congregation and connected community who were involved or consulted in the project included Steven Brawley, Ian Darnell, Jim Andris, Rodney Wilson, Miranda Rechtenwald, Andrea Friedman, Ellie Chapman, Etta Taylor, and Martha Baker (notably, no gay women from Trinity were in this group).¹ The application covered the time period from 1969 to 1993. 1969 was the year Trinity began to serve as a host for the Mandrake Society, a gay rights group in Central West End, and 1993 was the year Trinity hosted the first mayoral debate on LGBTQ+ issues. The application was successful, and Trinity was named to the NRHP for its importance to LGBTQ+ history in 2020, and the plaque was installed in 2021. Trinity became the first site in Missouri and the first Episcopal parish in the country to be recognized by the NRHP for its significance in LGBTQ+ history.

Trinity members attend the plaque installation ceremony.



Source: "CWE's Trinity Episcopal Church."

Based on the application criteria of the NRHP, the application focused more on the physical building of Trinity, and not as much on the congregation. The application includes a lengthy description of the physical building, its architecture, and the history of additions to the building. This meant that the emphasis was on groups and events that were hosted in the church building. Since many of these groups were mainly gay men's groups, this meant that the project mainly focused on the gay men of Trinity. That left a

¹ Dr. Katie Batza (Primary) and Michelle Diedrich, "Trinity Episcopal Church," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, listed October 29, 2019.

gap, which parishioner Nanora Sweet, a former Women's and Gender Studies professor at UMSL, called attention to in her communications with Trinity's priest Jon Stratton. In 1988, with Linda Belford's help, Nan Sweet contributed the oral histories of four St. Louis area lesbians from the fifties through the eighties to the State Historical Society of Missouri. These histories were summarized in the November 1988 Lesbian and Gay News Telegraph, and used as a resource by researchers listed above. She wished to have the contributions that lesbian parishioners have made at Trinity officially recognized, and she also wished to strengthen Trinity's lesbian community. This project began with the goal of fulfilling these wishes, and engaging the Trinity community around the history of lesbians in the congregation. Nan Sweet sent her request to Fr. Jon Stratton in September of 2021.² In November of that year, my work at a different placement site ended. DAH's director Michaelene Miller began communications with Fr. Jon Stratton, and by mid-January of 2022 I began my work at Trinity. I have been meeting regularly with Fr. Jon, and working closely with Nan Sweet.

History of activism at Trinity, starting in 1953

Trinity's work started a long time before the time period covered by the NRHP application. In 1999, the late Bishop Walmsley wrote to Trinity's Rector Jennifer Phillips about his time as rector of Trinity from 1953 to 1958, "We even had our own 1950's version of the blessing of same-sex unions when I was asked to preside at house blessings of a number of parishioners living in committed relationships; it's clearly inappropriate not to bless *all* the rooms in a house or apartment!"³ Unfortunately, there's little written record of these services existent today, because they had to have happened outside official diocesan sanction, so they were not added to official service records. This goes to show that Trinity has had a long-time commitment to diversity and acceptance.

I will give an overview of gay male groups and activism at Trinity here, but that is not the focus of this paper. Several resources listed in the bibliography contain more extensive information about gay men at Trinity, for readers curious about that aspect of Trinity's history. The Sexuality and Spirituality chapter from the 1975-2005 Trinity History written by Etta Taylor and Martha Baker is a good resource, and so is Trinity's NRHP application.

Trinity began hosting the Mandrake Society, St. Louis's first gay rights organization,⁴ in 1969. That same year several men in drag were arrested by the police on Halloween, and Trinity gained notoriety as the Mandrake group subsequently grew.⁵ In 1977 a chapter of Integrity, an Episcopal gay group, formed and met at Trinity, and

² Nanora Sweet, letter to Jon Stratton and Trinity congregation, February 26, 2022.

³ Martha K. Baker and Etta Taylor, "A History of Trinity Church, St. Louis, 1975-2005," accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.trinitycwe.org/trinity-s-history>.

⁴ Batza, "Trinity Episcopal Church."

⁵ Doyle Murphy, "Higher Calling: Trinity Episcopal and the Fight for Gay Rights," *Riverfront Times*, February 26, 2020, <https://www.riverfronttimes.com/news/higher-calling-trinity-episcopal-and-the-fight-for-gay-rights-33144057>.

they enabled Trinity to hold a monthly Evensong service until 1980.⁶ Integrity consisted mainly of gay men in its earlier years, although without having read their constitution, it is unclear if that was by design. In any case, they were at least open to women members by the early 2000s, when Deacon Barbi Click joined them. This Evensong service was open to the congregation, not exclusive to Integrity. Trinity's priest Bill Chapman's rejection of Integrity's request to hold Eucharists at Trinity could have been interpreted as a rejection of the gay group; however, his intention was for Integrity to become a part of the Trinity community.⁷ He feared that holding a separate, exclusive Eucharist service for Integrity would foster separation more than it would promote inclusiveness.

An icon in Trinity Episcopal church incorporating members of Trinity around the Rev. Charles Bewick's coffin



Murphy, "Higher Calling."

Trinity played a large role during the AIDS epidemic in St. Louis. One notable story is that of the Rev. Charles Bewick, an Anglican priest who came to St. Louis in 1983.⁸ While he was in the US, serving at St. Michael and St. George, Rev. Bewick became ill and was diagnosed with AIDS. He was fired by his bishop, Michael Marshall, and only Diocese of Missouri Bishop Bill Jones' intervention kept him from being defrocked as well. Bewick found a refuge at Trinity, where he was hired as an assistant priest, and he worked there until his death in 1989. He founded and worked on the board of Doorways, a housing program for people with AIDS that still exists today.⁹ Trinity's priest Bill Chapman tended to him when he grew sicker. Trinity marched in his honor at the Pride parade the summer after his death. In 1989 the Rev. Bill Chapman also committed to hold funerals for victims of AIDS who were not Trinity members before their deaths, but were isolated from their home parishes.

⁶ Baker and Taylor, "A History of Trinity Church."

⁷ Amy Adams Squire and Ellie Chapman, interview by Krista Osborne, Trinity Episcopal Church, May 16, 2022.

⁸ Baker and Taylor, "A History of Trinity Church."

⁹ Counterlight, "Charles Bewick," Counterlight's Peculiar, December 6, 2018. <https://counterlightsrantsandblather1.blogspot.com/>.

In 1987 the Rev. Bill Chapman, acting on his own initiative, participated in the life commitment of gay couple Jeffrey Bessler and Alan Cramer. One of the men was from Trinity, but the ceremony was held outside Trinity and presided over by a Lutheran priest. He informed Bishop Jones after the fact, who rebuked Chapman for taking action without first consulting him. In 1990, the Rev. Susan Nanny (a lesbian herself) began pastoral counseling for Amy Adams Squire and Carrie Clement (later Carrie Alexah), a lesbian couple, and in 1991 their holy union was celebrated at Trinity. At their union, they assumed the surname Strongheart. Their marriage was the first gay marriage held at Trinity.¹⁰

In 1991, Trinity's Women's Spirituality Group started a committee to discuss spirituality and sexuality. The committee consisted of nine laypeople and one clergy member: Ron Ciolli, Mary Moore, Leslee Shaw, Kris Zapalac, Carlos Daughaday, Denise Sommers, Chuck McManis, Jim Richardson, Betty Weber, and the Rev. Susan Nanny. This group started meeting in the fall of 1991. In November of 1992 several members attended a Diocese of Missouri workshop on sexuality. The committee meetings that they had been having prepared them well for the discussion.¹¹ During Lent of 1993, that committee led workshops for Trinity's congregation, and over 50 people attended. Multiple members of Trinity later cited those workshops as helping them have a better understanding of the issues surrounding gay marriages and ordinations.¹²

1993 was the end of the period covered under the NRHP application. That year, Trinity hosted the first Mayoral Forum on lesbian and gay rights. "Five mayoral candidates including four Democrats and one Independent faced a crowd of roughly 130 potential voters for questions and comments after Sunday Church services. The Forum was sponsored by ACTION, a gay and lesbian advocacy group in St. Louis with ties to Trinity."¹³ Mayor Freeman Bosley, Jr. won the subsequent election. He put out an official Pride proclamation and started a city gay and lesbian taskforce. 1993 was also the year the Rev. Bill Chapman retired after 24 years of service at Trinity.

History of activism at Trinity, 1993 to now

When the Rev. Bill Chapman retired, the Rev. Susan Nanny took over as interim. She left in 1994, and the Rev. Jennifer Phillips started work at Trinity in 1995. In 1996, Trinity became the host for the St. Louis chapter of Dignity, a Catholic LGBTQ+ group.¹⁴ Trinity had already been host to the Mandrake Society, Integrity, Open Doors, GLAA (Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance), Glad (GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders), and the Gay Liberation Front. The Rev. Jennifer Phillips wrote a letter to Bishop Rockwell about same-sex unions, urging him to give his blessing. She said that "Trinity was not content to "sneak around" yet did not want to cause damage to him or to Trinity's

¹⁰ Baker and Taylor, "A History of Trinity Church."

¹¹ Trinity's Spirituality and Sexuality Group, letter to Bishop Rockwell, May 11, 1993.

¹² Spirituality and Sexuality Group, letter; Julien Worland and Kate Worland, letter to Trinity congregation, November 17, 1996.

¹³ Batza, "Trinity Episcopal Church."

¹⁴ "Trinity Parish Episcopal to Be New Dignity, St. Louis Home," July 30, 1996.

relationship with him.”¹⁵ Trinity had performed multiple same sex blessings since 1991, but the bishop had not yet granted his approval.

Many members of Trinity testified at sexuality and spirituality workshops during the Diocesan Convention of 1996 about their experience witnessing same-sex blessings and attending a welcoming church. Several of them cited the earlier spirituality and sexuality workshops as having given them a better understanding of the issues surrounding gay marriages and ordinations, and they were able to share that understanding with other parishes in the diocese.

The Rev. Jennifer Phillips brought forth a proposal at 1996 Diocesan Convention that liturgy for same-sex blessings be written, so that when “same-sex unions are sanctioned by the national church,” it would be ready to add to the Book of Occasional Services. Their intent was to build a base of support in the diocese so that their proposal might be accepted at a later convention. Ann Watts, Trinity’s then senior warden, said in an interview later, “I thought it would take three to five years before we’d be effective, so since I wasn’t a delegate, I went home after the workshops... If I thought the proposal had had a prayer of passing, I would have stayed.”¹⁷ Surpassing her expectations, the convention passed the proposal that year. This granted diocesan approval for same-sex unions. In contrast, General Convention only acknowledged and affirmed same-sex couples as part of the church in 2009, and recommended liturgy for same-sex blessings in 2012.

In 1998, the Lambeth Conference passed a resolution saying that homosexual practice was incompatible with scripture. Bishop Rockwell signed a Pastoral Statement which asked the Anglican Communion to continue prayerful and respectful conversation about homosexuality. At a subsequent diocesan gathering, Trinitarian lesbian Teri Smith asked the Bishop and his wife about starting an Oasis ministry in the Diocese of Missouri. Oasis was a list of churches in the diocese that committed to be welcoming and affirming. They “signed a public affirmation of [their] commitment to the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people; and [participated] in ministry to further the work which [they have] affirmed.”¹⁸ There were existing Oasis ministries in the dioceses of Newark and California, but they were not connected on a national level.

¹⁵ Baker and Taylor, “A History of Trinity Church.”

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ “A Working History of The Oasis Missouri,” Diocese of Missouri Oasis files, July 9, 2004.

Trinity Episcopal Church parishioners march at Pride with an Oasis banner.



Source: Trinity archives

An Oasis group formed to share ideas and build support for the ministry. The group included Teri Smith and her partner Kathy Jones, the Rev. Jennifer Phillips, Keith Walsh, Anne and Charlie Watts, and Bill and Fritz Baker, all from Trinity St. Louis; as well as the Rev. Jason Samuel and Joe Doyle from Transfiguration Lake St. Louis, Heidi and Mike Clark from Advent Crestwood, Linda Belford (a mentee of Nan's at UMSL) and Lydia Ruffin from Christ Church Cathedral, and the Rev. Lydia Speller and Carol Wesley from St. Marks St. Louis. Oasis California shared their programs and materials, which they were able to modify to fit their diocese. The group prepared an Oasis presentation and two workshops for the Diocesan Convention in 1999, including a guest speaker brought from Oasis California. Trinity's congregation had some fears that they would be pigeonholed as a "gay church,"¹⁹ but these fears were alleviated by the nature of Oasis as a diocesan-wide program, not one specific to Trinity only. In 2000 Trinity, Transfiguration, and Christ Church all voted to become Oasis congregations, and Oasis Missouri was recognized as a Diocesan ministry. In 2001 St. Marks became an Oasis congregation as well. Church of the Advent in Crestwood joined in 2004.

During all this, the Rev. Jennifer Phillips left Trinity in 2000, and the Rev. Ann Kelsey was hired in 2001. In 2003 she held the first Mass on the Grass service at Tower Grove Park,²⁰ and that same year Trinity joined the Pride Parade down Grand Ave. Trinity held Mass on the Grass services from that year until 2013, when Pride celebrations were moved downtown.

Trinity has continued to regularly attend Pride, as a *Riverfront Times* article from 2020, Higher Calling: Trinity Episcopal and the Fight for Gay Rights, can attest. Trinity had a table at Tower Grove Pride in September 2021 and many years leading up to it, and members volunteered at the Episcopal booth held by Christ Church Cathedral at Pride downtown in June 2022.

¹⁹ Baker and Taylor, "A History of Trinity Church."

²⁰ Martha K. Baker and Etta Taylor, "Trinity History - in Brief," accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.trinitycwe.org/trinity-s-history>.

Lesbian clergy

The Rev. Sue Eastes with her partner Virginia Noel.



Photographer: Martha Ficklen

The Rev. Sue Eastes was Trinity's first out lesbian priest. She was hired in 1985, and ordained as an assistant priest in 1986. When the Rev. Bill Chapman attended the life commitment of Jeffrey Bessler and Alan Cramer in 1987, she went with him, and she and parishioner Harry Weber served as readers.²¹ Sue later served at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church.

The Rev. Susan Nanny in vestments in 1995.



Photographer: Martha Ficklen

The Rev. Susan Nanny began at Trinity as a curate in 1990. In 1990 she began pastoral counseling for Amy Adams Squire and her partner, then Carrie Clement, later Carrie Alexah Strongheart, and she took part in their holy union in 1991. The Rev. Bill

²¹ Baker and Taylor, "A History of Trinity Church."

Chapman chose to take full responsibility for the decision to hold their marriage, so that any consequences would fall on him as the senior priest and not on the Rev. Susan Nanny, who had only just begun her career as a priest. After the Rev. Bill Chapman left, the Rev. Susan Nanny served as Trinity's interim priest until 1994.

The Rev. Barbi Click, a lesbian, first visited Trinity in 2008. She was hired in 2013 to run Trinity's Food Ministry program, and continues to work there in that position. On most Sundays she serves in the role of deacon at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Carondelet. Barbi's wife Debbie attends St. Paul's with her. In my interview with her, Barbi said she feels that the members of the congregation don't treat her any differently because she is a lesbian.²² She told a story about the people who come to Trinity's food pantry. One woman kept asking her about her husband, and Barbi didn't say anything for a while, but eventually she told the woman, "I'm not married to a man." The woman's jaw dropped, and within a few days everyone else who came to the pantry knew Barbi was married to a woman. However, there were no negative repercussions. Everyone there already knew Barbi well, so finding out she was gay didn't change the way they treated her. Later, it turned out that the woman's daughter was also a lesbian. Because of her identity, Barbi was able to connect with that woman on a deeper level.

Deacon Barbi also told a story about her time before Trinity. She and her wife used to live in Fort Worth, Texas. Their community there was very unwelcoming. At one point, their next door neighbor discovered they were a gay couple and started flying a Confederate flag. When Barbi and her partner knew they wanted to leave their home, they sold or gave away most of their belongings, packed their ten-year-old and what was left of their belongings into a small motor home, and went around speaking to different Episcopal churches around the country, sharing their story. They were invited to places as far afield as Rochester, New York; Stockton, California; Caspar, Wyoming; Austin, Texas; Lebanon, Missouri; and Gambier, Ohio. They shared about their experiences in the church, and explained why they had stayed, despite feeling unwelcome in Texas. According to Barbi, "It wasn't *the church* that didn't want us, it was *that church*. That diocese." They spent ten months on the road. Barbi shared what they found out on that trip:

We thought we went to tell our story. We thought we went to tell about two moms and a kid. We didn't. At every place we went, we initiated every one of them with our story. And then, we sat back and listened. The thing that we learned is that everybody wanted to talk about someone- their mother or their father or their brother or their sister or their aunt or their best friend. They wanted to know more, but they couldn't talk to other people about them, even in 2007. They couldn't just come out and say, "My brother is gay. I love him, but I don't know what to do with this."... It was an amazing time. It wasn't so much for us as it was for all those people across the nation, who needed to talk about people they loved. It gave them an opportunity. Who knows what little bit of good it could have done in helping those people open up.²³

²² Cody Burluson and Barbi Click, interview by Krista Osborne, Trinity Episcopal Church, April 7, 2022.

²³ Barbi Click, Erin O'Rourke, and Nanora Sweet, panel discussion led by Krista Osborne, Trinity Episcopal Church, June 8, 2022.

At the end of that long trip, meeting so many people in the church, Barbi realized that she was able to open doors for conversations across the country. Just by being there and sharing her story, she allowed people to open up about things they hadn't talked to anyone about before.

From left: Nanora Sweet, Erin O'Rourke, Barbi Click, and the author at a storytelling panel held at Trinity.



Photographer: Debra Knox Deierman

Lesbians and LGBTQ+ women at Trinity

Up to here, this paper has discussed the history of Trinity parish and its diocese, but Trinity would not be the church it is today without its parishioners. Here, I will share the stories of some of Trinity's individual lesbian and queer members.

Nan Sweet, the initial advocate for this project, has been a part of Trinity for a long time, often alongside her daughter, Jennifer. A cradle Episcopalian, Nan values the church's "Catholic" inclusivity signaled by infant baptism, neighborhood parishes, and civic sanctuary. She also relies on its centuries of rich English-language liturgy for social and spiritual sustenance. In a letter to Trinity last year, she wrote about an experience in 1981 losing a teaching job because she didn't wear a skirt. She had just been divorced, and was unable to qualify for a credit card at the time. Trinity picked her up at those times, and the literary women's group there helped her find a new, less restrictive job.

Nan Sweet at Trinity's storytelling panel.



Photographer: Debra Knox Deierman

She fondly remembers the feminist groups she used to meet with at Trinity. "There was already a group of largely straight women, who were very literate and accepting. I was glad to be part of a community of women who were just entering the workforce, and a social group [of] professional [women who were] making [their] own living. In many ways this church provided that setting for lesbians and straight women."²⁴ Like Ellie, Nan told her students at UMSL about the welcoming place that Trinity was. Georgia Johnston, her friend, a fellow lesbian, and a Virginia Woolf scholar from SLU, also contributed to Trinity, in their Women's Spirituality.

Georgia Johnston (right) with companion Paige Canfield, at an early 1990s Pride.



Photographer: Martha Ficklen

Nan Sweet met her partner, Martha Ficklen, through a lesbian poetry circle. Martha used to be an active member at Trinity as well, but recently her health has declined and she has had to move to a nursing care facility. She, like Nan, was a member of the feminist women's writing and teaching circles which overlapped with

²⁴ Ibid.

Trinity.²⁵ As can be seen in the captions of many of the inset photos, Martha was a prolific photographer in the parish and community.

Amy Adams Squire, 1995



Photographer: Martha Ficklen

Amy Adams Squire came to Trinity because of a conversation with Ellie Chapman in 1986, when Ellie was her professor. Amy mentioned to Ellie that she was having a hard time finding a church that wouldn't threaten her with hellfire and damnation. Ellie told her about this little church in Central West End where she'd be welcome, where Ellie's husband Bill Chapman was the rector. Amy recalls telling her mother, a liberal Presbyterian, that she was becoming an Episcopalian. She asked if her mother minded, and she responded, "Oh, no honey, I'm just glad you believe in something."²⁶

Trinity members marching in Pride, with Amy Adams Squire and her partner Carrie Alexah Strongheart carrying the banner.



Source: Trinity Episcopal Church archives

Amy was an active member of Trinity while she was here. Between 1993 and 1999, she contributed a monthly column as Amy Adams Squire Strongheart on LGBTQ issues to the *Post-Dispatch*, as the newspaper's resident gay voice. She often wrote about the AIDS epidemic, and through that writing expressed her faith. In Amy's words,

²⁵ Sweet, letter.

²⁶ Adams Squire and Chapman, interview.

“that is the essence of Christian life, caring for the outcast... no one was more outcast than men with aids.”²⁷ In addition to her column, she collaborated with Robert Goss to write the 1998 book *Our Families, Our Values*, which touched on the celebration of her holy union and other experiences at Trinity (although Trinity was never explicitly named in the book, many of the experiences described happened there). She and her former partner Carrie Alexah Strongheart have since separated, and Amy no longer uses the name Strongheart. Alexah has stayed at Trinity a while longer since Amy left. In 2006, she chaired Trinity’s arts committee and put together a brochure about the Stations of the Cross exhibit in North Parish Hall.²⁸

Carrie Alexah at Trinity’s Whitsunday (Pentecost)
in 1995.



Photographer: Martha Ficklen

Other lesbians who were drawn to Trinity in the 1980s and 1990s included Catherine Bockmier, Denise Sommers, Ruth Harker, Mary Swanson, Teri Smith, Kathy Jones. Catherine Bockmier served on the vestry, and was part of the body that hired Anne Kelsner as Trinity’s priest in 2001. She joined with her partner Denise Sommers in holy union at Trinity in 1991. Ruth Harker was a goalie on the 1985 US women’s soccer team. After she came to Trinity, she and her partner Mary Swanson were married at Trinity in 2004. Teri Smith and Kathy Jones were married in 1996, and went on to be founding members of Oasis Missouri.

Deacon Barbi Click, the head of Trinity’s food ministry program, is assisted in her work by Cody Burleson, a trans lesbian. Cody first came to Trinity in 2016, and started working as assistant to the food ministry in 2021. Cody recounted her experience of coming out and transitioning at Trinity in my interview with her and Barbi. Before coming out, she worried that it would change her relationship with the congregation. Trinity was one of her most important communities since coming to St. Louis, and she didn’t want to lose that by transitioning. However, Trinity was also one of the first places Cody came

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Baker and Taylor, “Trinity History.”

²⁹ Baker and Taylor, “A History of Trinity Church.”

out. Father Jon Stratton was one of the first people Cody told about her transition, and he helped her announce her transition to the congregation through a church newsletter. The congregation took the news in stride. According to Cody, “Having a kid changed my relationship with the congregation more than transitioning.”³⁰ Having that base of support at Trinity made coming out to other communities easier. Cody and her wife, Alicia, attend Trinity, along with their young daughter Rosie. Alicia works in labor and union organizing.

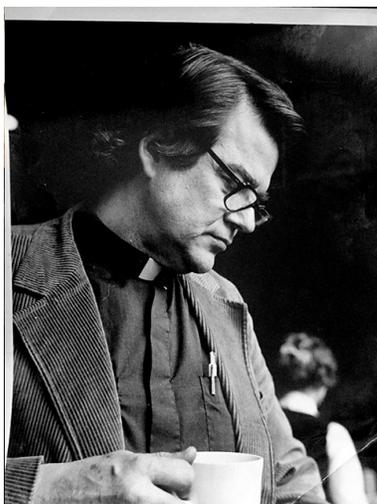
In just the last year, more LGBTQ+ parishioners have come to Trinity. Several members of Deaconess Anne House this year have been members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Several more lesbians and queer women have also begun attending Trinity in recent years. Trinity’s ongoing presence at Pride and other LGBTQ+ events in St. Louis will likely continue to attract churchgoing people looking for a welcoming church.

Supportive clergy

Although there is little information about it, Bishop Arthur Walmsley was the first priest at Trinity (that I’m aware of, at least) to start offering blessings for same sex couples. He claimed to have provided house blessings for gay couples between 1953 and 1958.³¹ These house blessings served as unofficial blessings of the couples’ relationships.

The Rev. Bill Chapman



Photographer: Ellie Chapman

Father Bill Chapman’s name has come up many times in the above sections. That’s because his impact on Trinity and the LGBTQ people there can’t be overstated.

³⁰ Burleson and Click, interview.

³¹ Baker and Taylor, “A History of Trinity Church.”

His name came up time and again during my research as well. In 1998, Amy Adams Squire wrote, “Fr. Chapman married those of us that no one else could and buried those of us that no one else would.”³² He served at Trinity first as a member of a three-person ministry team from 1970 to 1980, and then as rector from 1980 to 1993; a span of 24 years in total. In 1987 he participated in a gay union outside Trinity. In 1989 he cared for the dying Charles Bewick, and told the vestry that he would hold funerals for non-parishioners who died of AIDS, and were isolated from their own churches. He went out of his way to create a welcoming environment for LGBTQ people. When Susan Nanny applied to work as a curate at Trinity in 1989, and shared with the Rev. Bill Chapman that she was a lesbian, he received the news with enthusiasm, and told her, “Good, that’s exactly what we’ve been looking for!”³³

Fr. Bill’s wife, Ellie Chapman, a professor in English at UMSL, brought some of her students to Trinity, including Amy Adams Squire. She created a welcoming space for young lesbian and feminist writers. When the Rev. Bill Chapman died in 1998, Amy Adams Squire wrote a moving article about him, which unfortunately never made it into the *Post-Dispatch* at first because it was pushed later by other articles, and then it was no longer timely. She wrote that “one of the most beloved advocates the St. Louis gay community has ever known [has] passed away. His death leaves an unfathomable void—one that cannot be filled, only endured.”³⁴

After the Rev. Bill Chapman retired and the Rev. Susan Nanny’s term as interim was over, the Rev. Jennifer Phillips came to Trinity. When she first came in 1995, she held a series of home potlucks for gay and lesbian parishioners, which fostered group connections and conversations. She led a discussion about liturgy for same-sex marriages to Diocesan Convention in 1996, and saw the proposal passed that same year.³⁵

The Rev. Bill Baker may have come to Trinity as a retired clergy member, but he was still active in the congregation. He and his wife Fritzzi were a part of the Oasis committee that met at Trinity, and when Trinity became an Oasis congregation in 2000 they served on its founding board.³⁶

³² Amy Adams Squire Strongheart, (Unpublished eulogy for Bill Chapman), *Post Dispatch*, December 18, 1998.

³³ Baker and Taylor, “A History of Trinity Church.”

³⁴ Adams Squire Strongheart, (Eulogy).

³⁵ Baker and Taylor, “A History of Trinity Church.”

³⁶ “The Oasis Missouri.”

The Rev. Anne Kelsey (in collar and dark blue shirt) with Fritzi Baker (left, in orange) and other parishioners.



Source: Trinity Episcopal Church archives

The Rev. Anne Kelsey began working at Trinity in 2001. The culmination of Oasis committee meetings, and Trinity's entry into membership in Oasis Missouri, occurred during her tenure. She had a lesbian daughter, and she spoke often in her sermons of that experience and the way it opened her up to a new community. In 2003 she celebrated Trinity's first Mass on the Grass at Tower Grove Park, which continued as a tradition until 2013.³⁷

All of Trinity's current clergy are supportive as well. The Rev. Harry Leip, ordained to the diaconate at Trinity in 2011, is a married gay man, and has participated in Trinity's LGBTQ small group held in the summer of 2022. The Very Rev. Jon Stratton, who was called to Trinity in 2015, regularly participates in Pride, and has traveled to Jefferson City and Washington DC several times and lobbied for abortion rights, racial justice, and other civil rights issues.

Faith and activism

The Christian religion calls for its practitioners to work towards justice and equality, to care for those in need, and to form relationships even with those shunned by most of society. The members of Trinity have defined their activism by their faith for a long time.

Back in 1953, Bishop Walmsley's faith led him to offer blessings for each and every person in his congregation, regardless of the people they were partnered with. At the same time, in the 50s, Trinity was on the decline. It dropped to 30-40 parishioners, and nearly closed. Bishop Lichtenberger met with church leaders and decided to keep it going, as it was the leading Anglo-Catholic parish in the diocese. At around the same time, the Brown vs. the Board of Education decision happened. People began transferring over to Trinity from All Saints', a primarily black church at the time. Trinity's

³⁷ Baker and Taylor, "Trinity History."

black membership rose to 25% by 1958. The church made a conscious decision to stay where they were in Central West End, which was becoming a largely black and queer neighborhood, and improve their local outreach to the people who were there. The Rev. Tony Morley (1958-65) started several neighborhood programs and welcomed more people. Trinity's decline turned around, and they even began to run out of space for events.³⁸ Ever since then Trinity has been focused on serving the community in the neighborhood around itself.

Faith has also defined the activism of many of the members I interviewed. For Amy, it was her faith that led her to call more attention to the AIDS epidemic with her mouthpiece column in the Post-Dispatch, and it was faith that led Trinity to care for so many of the epidemic's victims. For Bill and Ellie Chapman, their faith insisted that they make no distinction between members of different identities. To Bill, it was important to him to be welcoming to everybody, which meant not offering exclusive worship services to any one group. The Rev. Jennifer Phillips said, "We understand the banquet table of God's reign as having room for all people and offering a special invitation for those who may be outcast, poor, bereaved, ill, homeless or in need."³⁹ Erin, from Deaconess Anne House, who spoke at the panel discussion, said of the Episcopal Church, "People can come from all different religious backgrounds and find safety here."⁴⁰ Trinity very much lives into the Christian practice of welcoming the stranger.

Trinity's future

Trinity has a long history of activism and inclusivity. It will need to keep working to keep its role in the community. Just recently, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, taking away women's nearly 50-year-old right to abortion. This happened after over a year of legislative attacks at the state level on the rights of trans youth and their families. In several states, the parents of trans children can be accused of child abuse and lose their children if they are accepting and allow their children to go on hormone blockers or transition. Many people fear that the federal and state courts plan to strip back further protections, such as the court decisions protecting gay marriage and the right to have gay sex without prosecution. All of that means that Trinity's activism is more important now than ever.

In late March of 2022, a group of Trinitarians gathered after church to write letters to legislators of Missouri, who were about to discuss a bill that would criminalize trans youth. The bill did not pass (not so much because of Trinity's efforts, but because lawmakers argued over other topics until the term expired). That afternoon brought many people from different walks of life. Letter writers included ordained clergy members, young children, whose parents wanted to teach them the value of writing to their senators, plenty of young people from Trinity, and representatives from the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. By the end of the day over 100 letters were written and sent. Trinity's work in the community is still going strong.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Baker and Taylor, "A History of Trinity Church."

⁴⁰ Click, O'Rourke, and Sweet, panel discussion.

Notes

A note about terminology:

- This project has involved many women at Trinity. Nan Sweet's initial letter was about the lesbians who were a part of her community. The project was later expanded to include other members of the LGBTQ+ community as well. Others who were interviewed included bisexual and trans women, and I wanted to reflect that in my labels. Therefore, I have tried to use the term "LGBTQ+" throughout, except where I am talking about individuals or groups that claim a more specific identity. LGBTQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and other non-cisgender, non-heterosexual people not covered by these labels.
- Queer is an umbrella term for people who are not straight and cisgender, and it can be used interchangeably with LGBTQ. However, it has sometimes been used as a slur. Some members of the LGBTQ+ community have chosen to reclaim it, but others remain uncomfortable with its usage. Therefore, I have tried to be careful around my use of it.
- The acronym LGBTQ+ is also sometimes expanded to LGBTQIA2S+, to include Intersex, Asexual or Agender, and two-spirit as well. I do intend all these people to be included, but I have kept the acronym shorter for the sake of space and ease of typing it multiple times, and it is also an acronym that has been (and will continue to be) added to and updated many times.
- I use the terms "gay women" and "lesbians" interchangeably when writing about homosexual women.
- Some of my sources are older and include the term "transgendered," but overwhelmingly the current preferred term is "transgender."⁴¹

⁴¹ Katy Steinmetz, "Why It's Best to Avoid the Word 'Transgendered'," *Time*, December 15, 2014, <https://time.com/3630965/transgender-transgendered/>.

The Oasis Affirmation of Welcome:

We believe that all people are worthy of respect and honor, because all are created in the image of God, and all can respond to the love of God. In our baptismal vows we commit ourselves, with God's help, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, by loving our neighbors as ourselves, respecting the dignity of every human being, and striving for justice and peace among all people.

Yet we see that, in our churches and in society, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people are not always counted among those for whom the Church seeks justice, or grants due respect, as loving and beloved members of the household of God. We recognize that fear of, and discrimination against, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people is part of an oppressive history within the Church and society, which distorts our relationship with God and with other people, and diminishes the humanity of us all.

Therefore we feel compelled to make explicit our welcome of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people into the ministries and life of this congregation, incarnating the message, "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You." We encourage gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people to participate in all aspects of the ministries of this church, by bearing witness to Christ, and fully participating in our life, worship and governance.

Where we see division, we will seek, with God's help to be a people of reconciliation, offering a love that casts out all fear. Where we see injustice and ignorance, we will offer our ministry of advocacy and education, trusting the Holy Spirit to lead us all into truth.

Transcription of Fr. Bill Chapman's Eulogy

Ellie: Talked to Donna at the P-D. She said that this piece was supposed to run 12/18 but was bumped because of the bombing in Iraq. Then she wouldn't run it because she felt it wasn't timely anymore. Thought you might like to have a copy anyway.

Much love

Amy

It is about 1:30 in the morning. Four hours ago, I received the news that one of the most beloved advocates the St. Louis gay community has ever known passed away. His death leaves an unfathomable void—one that cannot be filled, only endured.

Rev. William D. Chapman, known to many simply as "Bill" or "Father Chapman," was an Anglican through and through, true to his Canadian roots, a veteran of the Royal Air Force, and a sailing enthusiast. His sermons were often peppered with recollections and insights gained from these aspects of his life. They helped make the Gospel message real and relevant.

I met Bill when I was a confirmand, preparing to switch allegiances from the Presbyterian to the Episcopal church. He inquired, as any good parish priest should, why I wanted to join the Episcopalians. I explained that as a lesbian, it could be difficult to find a place to worship without being judged, ridiculed, or excluded altogether. His flock included a sizeable gay population that was active in the life of the church, and I felt quite at home. My story was the same one he had heard from countless gay men and women. He just nodded. For him, my sexual orientation was a non-issue. Bill's method of pastoring was to trust people to do and to be as they were called, although he never shied away from offering his considered assessment of one's individual path.

Bill never recoiled from any challenge. In 1991, when the doctrinal ins-and-outs of a same-sex union were even more convoluted than they are now, Bill Chapman married my life-partner and me. For this I will be forever indebted to him, because he put himself and his career at great risk to do what he thoughtfully and prayerfully had come to believe was right.

In the 1980s, when the gay men in our community began to get sick with HIV, Bill didn't just pray for them or visit them in the hospital. He sat with them, held their hands, and cried with them. A fellow priest, Charles Bewick, who had been dismissed when his parish discovered he was gay and had AIDS was offered sanctuary and employment by Bill. When Father Bewick became so ill that he could barely care for himself, Bill bathed

him and fed him. And when he died, Bill gave him a Christian burial, something that other clergymen were too timid to do. It always seemed to me that he was a hands-on kind of guy. He wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty in the service of God. Fr. Chapman married those of us that no one else could and buried those of us that no one else would.

Despite his remarkably evolved social conscience and faith in his fellow man, Bill did have his shortcomings. He was fond of a good, stiff drink; a hearty meal; and a quiet smoke. He had been heard on occasion to use language that must surely have offended the saints and was reputed to be quite testy at times. I suppose that these "indulgences of the flesh," as some might see them, just made him human. The mantle of leadership, particularly spiritual leadership, can be a heady experience. With the help of his wife, Ellie, whom he adored beyond all measure, he always stayed mindful of his humanity.

One of my fondest memories of him comes from a Maundy Thursday foot-washing ceremony some years ago. I had just begun writing this guest commentary for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and the disdainful responses were still coming fast and furious. Bill had been a staunch advocate of my witness, always encouraging me not to despair.

With all due reverence for the solemn reenactment of Jesus washing the disciples feet, I walked up the aisle, sat down in the chair, and daintily presented my foot for Bill to scrub. He looked up at me with that I'm-up-to-no-damn-good look in his eye, towel in hand, and said quietly, without expression, "We canceled our subscription to the *Post-Dispatch* today." I was unable to suppress a giggle. In that instant, I was brought from the lofty mountain top to the immediacy of time and place. That was so like him, to be one with God, but never at the expense of the present moment here on earth.

I am comforted by the knowledge that he is now in that place where those things for which he stood are eternal, and those things he stood against do not exist.

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