

Ministers who led Trinity Parish

Trinity Episcopal Church on the Green in New Haven, Connecticut, has a long history of attracting distinguished ministers of the Anglican Communion to lead it. As of 2015, fifteen ordained Anglican priests have led the people of the parish in regular religious services since it was founded in 1723. Three were Church of England missionary *priests-in-charge* of the parish, eleven were Episcopal Church *rectors*, and one was both. Their average length of service was 19 years. In addition, Trinity was led by three *interim* priests for about four years.

Missionary Priests in the Colonial Era

The region of South Western Connecticut that included Trinity Parish was visited or led by at least 11 Church of England clergymen as missionary priests between 1705 to 1778. All of these missionary priests were funded by the *Venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (SPG). The society was founded in 1701 in London to spread the Church of England (COE) religion overseas. Three of these early missionaries were from New York or Rhode Island, but covered the region around New Haven before the parish was formed in 1723. Four were formally assigned to lead the parish by the SPG between 1723 and 1775. Four were assigned to neighboring Connecticut colony parishes, but occasionally supported the Rev. Dr. Johnson, who serviced New Haven out of his Stratford, Connecticut church.¹ Three of the missionaries assigned to Trinity Parish were resident in New Haven. By birth, two of these 11 missionary priests were English, one was Irish, one was Scottish, and seven were born in America before 1776 – though, of course, they all were subjects of the British Empire until July 4, 1776.

In 1723, the American Rev. Dr. Samuel Johnson became the SPG funded resident priest-in-charge of the Stratford parish. He was the sole missionary priest in the colony. After his return from his ordination trip to England in November of that year, Johnson immediately established house church parishes in New Haven, West Haven, and North Haven. New Haven was only 14 miles from his home church in Stratford, about a four-hour ride. He monthly or quarterly rode a circuit that included over 750 square miles of southwestern Connecticut.

Rev. Dr. Samuel Johnson remained in charge of the parish for 30 years, though he had help from various neighboring missionary ministers for the about 9 years of that period. While they were students at Yale, Johnson also appointed his sons William Samuel Johnson and William “Billy” Johnson as SPG funded lay-readers and catechists in various towns in the region, including New Haven. The SPG also sent a series of four clergymen to neighboring Connecticut towns; they would occasionally assist Johnson by holding services in Trinity Parish between 1739 and 1753. None of the local missionary priests replaced Johnson as the official priest-in-charge of Trinity Parish, and none of them were resident in New Haven until late in 1753, when Rev. Punderson replaced Johnson as priest-in-charge.² The Anglicans in the region for the entire period looked up to Johnson as the “senior missionary”.³ Both students and parishioners attended monthly communion services four miles from New Haven in West Haven’s Christ Church after it was constructed in 1745, but they continued to attend house-church services in New Haven at other times.

Sometime between 1728 and 1750, Johnson appointed two wardens for the parish, and planned the construction of the first Trinity Church.⁴ Wardens Isaac Doolittle and Enos Alling obtained a deed in July of 1752 from Samuel Mix, Jr., for a small lot, and began construction of the first Trinity Church. At his own behest, the SPG appointed the aging and somewhat cantankerous missionary Rev. Punderson (1704–1764) of New London, Connecticut to lead Trinity Parish as the first resident priest-in-charge of Trinity Parish. He took up the pulpit three months after a Trinity Church opened in June of 1752. He was followed in 1763 by the SPG appointed missionary Rev. Palmer. When Palmer left in 1766, Johnson took back the parish for about a year. In 1767, the Rev. Dr. Hubbard became the last SPG missionary of Trinity Church, as well as its first rector.

Rectors of the Protestant Episcopal Church

The Revolution in America not only separated Americans from the government of Great Britain, it also separated Anglicans in America from the Church of England. Rather more unfortunately, it separated many missionaries from their funding source, the royally chartered Venerable Society (SPG). Rev. Hubbard had taken an oath to the British Monarch; beginning on July 1776, after the passing of the *Declaration of Independence*, he stopped using the *Book of Common Prayer* service that required he pray for the King, essentially “closing” the church, though it seems he continued holding less formal services.⁵ However, with the approval of the Archbishop of Canterbury, he resumed full services again on December 20, 1778, though without the prayers for the King and Parliament. He thus became the first Rector of the self-sustaining Trinity Parish. When a new national church was formed in 1783, Trinity’s Rev. Hubbard became part of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America (PECUSA).

In the years since Trinity Parish became independent of the Church of England and the SPG, 12 ordained priests have led the parish as its rector. Rev. Henry Whitlock was Trinity’s first domestically ordained rector; he was ordained by Bishop Jarvis in 1802. Hired as an assistant rector in 1811 to support the ailing Dr. Hubbard, and taking over the leadership of the church in 1812 when Hubbard died, he too became ill and died in 1814. More than an assistant or interim rector, he was never elected officially a rector by the vestry. Neither his successors Dr. Crowell nor Dr. Hubbard labeled him a rector, though later rectors and other historians – such as the great scholar Dr. Eben Beardsley – have been more inclusive.⁶ Here too, he is identified as a rector.

The Rev. Doctor Johnson took over the parish again when a missionary was not available to cover New Haven in 1766-1767. In addition, three interim rectors led the parish for about four years of its history. One was a former rector, Rev. Scoville, who came back to lead the parish for a year while the parish searched for a new rector.

The rectors who led Trinity Episcopal Church starting with Rev. Punderson up to 2002 are documented more extensively in Ed Getlein’s history of Trinity Church, *Here Will I Dwell*.⁷

Doctors of Divinity and Founders of Schools

Three-fifths (9 out of 15) of the clergy who led the parish were Doctors of Divinity. Three were founders of colleges.

Dr. Samuel Johnson received a BA from Yale in 1714 and a MA in 1717. He received an honorary MA from Oxford and an MA from Cambridge in 1723, the first honorary master’s each college awarded to a native-born American. He also received a DD from Oxford in 1743: it was the only the second doctorate awarded to a native-born American. A noted educational reformer as well as a theologian and America’s first philosopher, he twice reformed Yale’s curriculum before going to New York City and founding King’s College as a “new-model” non-denominational college; its charter served as a template for most American colleges that followed.

In addition, the Rev. Dr. Harry Crowell was a founder of Washington College, in New Haven – which later moved to Hartford and changed its name to Trinity College. He also founded in New Haven a night school for adult blacks, and organized the first Sunday school in the town.

The Rev. Dr. Harwood was a founding professor at Berkeley Divinity School; he also built a school attached to the parish around the time of the Civil War, which has since disbanded.

Note that six out of nine of Crowell’s assistant rectors between 1828 and 1858 that Dr. Harwood mentions in his *Semi-Centennial* Sermon were Doctors of Divinity. The assistant Rector Rev. Dr. John Seely Stone was the author of 44 books, and the first dean of the Episcopal theological seminary, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Assistant Rector Rev. Joseph H. Nichols was a founder and Professor of English Literature at Racine College, Wisconsin.

Table of Priests who led Connecticut before Parish Founding

Technically, these three SPG missionary priests were in charge of the region that included Trinity Parish. However, only Rev. Pigot is known to have visited New Haven, and only to attended the Commencement of 1722. There are no records of services, baptisms, marriages, or burials. At least three other New York or Rhode Island based “itinerate” missionary priests visited New Haven between 1705 and 1723. The Rev. George Keith and the Rev. John Talbot of New Jersey – today known as “The Apostle of the New Jersey Church” – visited New London. Rev. Talbot also visited Fairfield County, where he found 40 Anglican families. One missionary, the learned and vigorous Rev. John Sharpe of New York, also visited Fairfield County.

From	To	#	Name	Born	Ordained	Comment
1705	1708	3	Rev. George Murison	Scotland	England, COE	Missionary of the SPG, based in Rye, NY. ⁸
1709	1719	10	Rev. Christopher Bridge	Tilling-ton, England	England, COE	Missionary of the SPG based in Rye, N. Y. Rev. Francis Philips ⁹ took over Stratford for five months in 1712-1713.
1722	1723	1	Rev. George Pigot	Warwick, Rhode Island	England, COE	Missionary of the SPG temporarily based in Stratford, Ct. ¹⁰ Attended the 1722 Yale commencement.

Table of Priests who led Trinity Parish

This table lists missionary priests and rectors who officially ministered in Trinity Parish between 1723 and 2015. Though no systematic attempt was made to identify all lay-readers or catechists – collegiates or graduates who offered teaching and limited services from 1723 to 1753, it is known that Johnson’s two sons, William Samuel Johnson and William “Billy” Johnson, filled that role and were funded by the SPG. There were 74 Yale graduates and 21 graduates from other colleges who were Johnson’s disciples at some point; a number of these men may also have assisted at services in New Haven in these years.

From mid-1753 to early 1816, services were conducted in a wooden “First Church”. It was never consecrated as there was no Bishop in American until long after it was opened. A second trap rock Gothic church was completed in 1815, and consecrated in 1816. It has housed Trinity Parish ever since then.

The Rev. Dr. Salmon Wheaton was appointed as the first assistant rector in 1807.¹¹ Rev. Henry Whitlock in 1811 was the second, though the next year he took over as rector as planned when the aged Rev. Hubbard died. No systematic effort was made to here list all the assistant rectors beyond the visiting missionaries of the SPG. Dr. Harwood’s list beginning in 1828 of vestry-approved assistant rectors may found in his *Semi-Centennial* pamphlet; Crosswell’s more complete list is found in his sermon *Forty Years in Trinity Parish*.¹² Later assistants may be found in Getlein’s *Here Will I Dwell*, and in parish records. Most assistants or associates stayed only for a few years. After Crosswell arrived, there was indeed, as Getlein noted, “a veritable caravan of assistant rectors”¹³ at Trinity. Some of them after leaving Trinity took up the highest Episcopal pulpits in the nation.

As of 2015, for 308 years, an ordained minister of the Anglican Communion has led Anglicans in Connecticut. For 292 years, services have been conducted for parishioners in an organized parish in New Haven. And for 256 of them, a Trinity Church has housed its worshippers.

From	To	#	Name	Born	Ordained	Comment
1723	1753	30	Rev. Dr. Samuel Johnson	Guilford, Ct.	England, COE	Missionary of the SPG, resident Stratford, Ct. Founder Trinity Parish 1723. Built first church in 1752.
1753	1762	9	Rev. Ebenezer Punderson	New Haven, Ct.	England, COE	First missionary priest in residence. First of the first Trinity church built in 1752-1753. ¹⁴ Considered impolite, the parish languished under him.
1763	1766	3	Rev. Solomon Palmer	Branford, Ct.	England, COE	Missionary based in New Haven, Ct. ¹⁵ A poor man, but gracious and much loved.
1766	1767	1	Interim - Rev. Dr. Samuel Johnson			Returned to take charge when Rev. Palmer Litchfield went to in 1766.
1767	1812	45	Rev. Dr. Bela Hubbard	Guilford, Ct.	England, COE, joined PECUSA around 1784	Missionary and Rector. Paid by SPG until the war cut off funding. First Rector under the PECUSA. ¹⁶
1812	1814	2	Rev. Henry Whitlock	Danbury, Ct.	New York, PECUSA	Rector. Trinity's First Domestically ordained priest, by Bishop Jarvis in 1802. ¹⁷
1815	1858	43	Rev. Dr. Harry Crosswell	West Harford, Ct.	New York, PECUSA	Rector. Crusading editor, defendant in People v. Crosswell. Establishing Press freedom. ¹⁸
1858	1859	1	Interim - Rev. Samuel Benedict	Litchfield, Ct.	New York, PECUSA	Interim (was Assistant minister). ¹⁹
1859	1894	35	Rev. Dr. Edwin Harwood	Philadelphia, Pa.	New York, PECUSA	Rector. Professor of Medieval Church History, Berkeley, Middletown. ²⁰ Est. Choir of Men and boys in 1885.
1895	1898	3	Rev. Dr. George William Douglas	New York	New York, PECUSA	Rector. Initiated advertising in newspapers. ²¹
1899	1905	6	Rev. Dr. Frank Woods Baker	Medford, Ma.	Maine, PECUSA	Rector. ²² Promoted mission work.

1908	1935	30	Rev. Dr. Charles Otis Scoville	Montpelier, Vt.	Ct. , PECUSA	Rector. Served first as assistant in 1892, then in 1905 became “minister in charge” for 3 years, then rector in 1908. ²³ Interim in 1939.
1935	1939	4	Rev. Theodore H. Evans	Virginia	New York, PECUSA	Rector - later Rector Cleveland, then at UVA. ²⁴ Abolished pew rentals.
1939	1940	1	Interim - Rev. Dr. Scoville comes back and fills in for a year			Interim. ²⁵ Thus he served a total of 44 years.
1940	1970	30	Rev. C. Lawson Willard	Philadelphia, Pa.	Long Island, New York, PECUSA	Rector. Considered something of a political radical. ²⁶
1970	1977	7	Rev. Craig Biddle III	Philadelphia, Pa.	America, PECUSA	Rector. Revitalized church with Rock Band and open communion in the round. During his term, Andy Fiddler served as Associate Rector. ²⁷
1977	2009	32	Rev. Andrew Fiddler	New York, NY	America, PECUSA	Rector. “movement away from experimentation and towards substantive changes.” ²⁸ Trinity Players 1975. Spirit Signers Gospel choir 1984. Choir of Men and Girls 2006. Chapel on the Green 2008.
2009	2011	2	Interim - Rev. James Sell	West Virginia	America, PECUSA	Interim. ²⁹
2011			Rev. Dr. Luk De Volder	Brussels, Belgium	Europe, PECUSA - Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe	Rector. Advocates digital communications and social media to promote education, arts, music and history.

Table of Missionaries Assisting Dr. Johnson in New Haven

The following ministers appear in some secondary sources as serving Trinity Parish while it was a house church in New Haven. Thus, these four missionaries are included in a separate table as “assisting” Johnson. Dr. Johnson, however, remained in charge of the parish as it was his best connection with Yale students.

1736	1739	3	Rev. Jonathan Arnold assisting Dr. Johnson	Hamden, Ct.	England, COE	Missionary priest of the SPG based in West Haven, Ct. , converted by Johnson. ³⁰ Attempted to clear plot of land in New Haven, but was mobbed off.
1740	1742	2	Rev. Theophilus Morris assisting Dr. Johnson	Ireland	Ireland, COE	Missionary priest of the SPG based in West Haven, Ct. ³¹ Was not suited to colonial life, and returned to England.

1743	1745	2	Rev. James Lyons (or Lyon) assisting Dr. Johnson	Warring-ton, England	England, COE	Missionary of the SPG based in Derby, Ct. , “He found a prejudice against foreigners.” ³² Lyons removed to Setauket NY in 1745. ³³
1748	1753	5	Rev. Dr. Richard Mansfield assisting Dr. Johnson	Guilford, Ct.	England, COE	Missionary resident Derby, Ct. , First Episcopalian honored with DD from Yale. ³⁴ Resided in Derby, while covering West Haven and Housatonic Valley towns to the north.

¹ The initial “Ecclesiastical region” of Connecticut included all of Connecticut, Long Island, most of Westchester County New York, the western bank of the Hudson in New York, and (according to Connecticut) western Massachusetts. Since Connecticut was an established church state, they banned Anglican priests. Until Rev. Johnson was settled in Stratford in 1723, resident missionary priests from Rye, New York served the eastern part of the colony, while New London and the western part of the state was visited by missionary priests out of Narraganset, Rhode Island.

² Beardsley, *The Grateful Remembrance*, pp. 15-16. Johnson wrote to the SPG after the Yale Commencement in 1732, that, “I continue to preach with success at New Haven and I hope there will be a church there in time though they labor under great opposition and discouragements from the people of the town who will neither give nor sell them a piece of land for them to build a church on.” On Oct. 1, 1746, Dr. Johnson wrote to the Secretary of the SPG: “There seems to be a very growing disposition towards the Church in the town of New Haven, as well as in the College, so that I hope ere long there will be a flourishing Church there.” On March 28, 1749 he writes “The Church is very considerably increasing at New Haven, where the College is, and a considerable sum is already subscribed towards building a Church; and it is not doubted but between the town and West Haven, a village within four miles, where there is already a neat little Church, there will soon be forty or fifty families.” Beardsley notes that, “Dr. Johnson writes in the same year to the Secretary, that Norwalk, Hebron, Middletown, Wallingford, Guilford and Branford, are ready to engage £30 per annum for the support of a Missionary...He makes no mention of New Haven, from which we conclude that they preferred remaining for the present connected with West Haven.” More likely, Trinity Parish members were still not allowed a plot for their own church, so Johnson gave services in house-churches in New Haven or parishioners journeyed 4 miles down to West Haven’s Christ Church. Johnson in the 1740s is spending a great deal of time in New Haven where his younger son attends Yale. He is helping President Clap reform the college, and he is administering the Berkeley scholarship there. Most likely, he went 14 miles to the house church in New Haven once a month, while his sons were lay-readers on the other weekends while they were at Yale. Johnson was in New Haven on Sunday, May 6th, 1750: “according to the entry in his parochial Register...he baptized six male children, all the sons of Daniel and Mehetabel Trowbridge, i. e. , Joseph, Newman, Thomas, Rutherford, Stephen, and John.” (Beardsley, *The History of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut*, Volume 1, p. 168).

³ Johnson and Schneider, *Writings*, Volume III, p. 227

⁴ The date the first wardens and vestry were appointed isn’t known, but there are letters to the SPG dated 1728, 1738, 1749 and 1750, that indicate Johnson is raising money and actively pursuing a deed for a church. We know that Johnson appointed Isaac Doolittle and Enos Alling to try to obtain a deed for a lot in New Haven around 1749. They finally obtained a deed from Samuel Mix Jr. in 1752, and immediately organized the building of a church.

⁵ Stiles, Volume 2, p. 314

⁶ Beardsley, *The History of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut*, Volume 1, pp. 111-112

⁷ Getlein, Ed, *Here Will I Dwell*, edited by Neil C. Olsen, edition 2, Trinity Church Publications, 2012. In some cases, new information more easily available due to the internet and digital scanning of previously hard to find information as of 2015 has provided better source information than Getlein had in 1975, which is reflected in these endnotes.

⁸ Beardsley, *The History of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut*, Volume 1, p. 20

⁹ Beardsley, *The History of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut*, Volume 1, p. 26

¹⁰ Beardsley, *The History of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut*, Volume 1, p. 27

¹¹ Getlein, p. 61. The Rev. Dr. Salmon Wheaton (1782–1844) was born in Washington Connecticut. He entered Yale College late in life in 1804 at age 22, and graduated rather quickly in 1805, suggesting he was already learned. He studied with Bishop Jarvis in New Haven, and was ordained on September 4, 1808. (Dexter, *Biographical Sketches*, Volume 5, p. 805). He was the Assistant Minister of Trinity church in 1807, before leaving to become the Rector of Trinity Church Newport, Rhode Island, in October 1810. He received an honorary degree of D. D. from Trinity College in 1835. In

1840, after 30 years in Newport, he moved to the tiny village of Johnstown, New York, and was for four years Rector of St. John's Church there. Dr. Harwood in his *Semi-Centennial* pamphlet called Rev. Francis L. Hawks, D. D. the first assistant Rector from 1828 to 1829; however, parish records suggests that Rev. Salmon Wheaton was indeed hired in 1807 to support the ailing Rev. Dr. Hubbard while the vestry looked for a replacement. He was followed in this role of curate or assistant minister by Rev. Henry Whitlock in 1811, who himself became ill, but took over the church for two years after Hubbard's death in 1812.

¹² Croswell, Harry, *Forty Years in Trinity Parish, New Haven*, Stafford, 1856. Croswell makes an undefined distinction between "associate Rectors" and "assistant Rectors". He writes, expanding Harwood's list somewhat: "The Associate Rectors have been—Rev. FRANCIS L. HAWKS, now Rector of Calvary Church, New York. Rev. JOHN S. STONE, now Rector of St. Paul's Church, Brookline, Massachusetts. Rev. WILLIAM L. KEESE, who after a short, though most efficient and acceptable ministry, fell into decline, and was gathered to an early reward. Rev. LORENZO T. BENNETT, now Rector of Christ Church, Guilford, Connecticut. Rev. THOMAS C. PITKIN, now Rector of St. Peter's Church, Albany, New York.

Among the Assistant Ministers have been— Rev. STEPHEN JEWETT, now resident in New Haven. Rev. EDWARD INGERSOLL, now Rector of Trinity Church, Buffalo, N. Y. Rev. WILLIAM LUCAS, since deceased. Rev. JAMES MACKAY, now Rector of a Church in Scotland. Rev. JOSEPH H. NICHOLS, now Rector of St. Luke's Church, Racine, Wisconsin. Rev. WILLIAM F. MORGAN, now Rector of Christ Church, Norwich, Connecticut. "

¹³ Getlein, p. 84

¹⁴ Getlein, Ed, *Here Will I Dwell*, edited by Neil C. Olsen, edition 2, Trinity Church Publications, 2012, p. 271

¹⁵ Getlein, pp. 40, 43

¹⁶ Getlein, p. 56

¹⁷ Getlein, pp. 71–74. Also *Convention journal and the diocesan canons*, The Diocese, 1890, Volume 100, p. 38, Hobart, John Henry, *The correspondence of John Henry Hobart*, Priv. Printing, 1911, p. 497, and Sprague, William, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, Robert Carter & Brothers, 1861, vol. 5, p. 235

¹⁸ Getlein, Chapter 5

¹⁹ Getlein, p. 109 (Interim); *Journal of the . . . annual convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, The Diocese, Volume 69, 1853, p. 20

²⁰ Getlein, p. 109, 132. Also the Obit in the *New York Times*, January 13, 1902.

²¹ Rhoades, Nelson, *Colonial families of the United States of America*, Editor George Norbury Mackenzie, The Grafton Press, 1917, Volume 6, p. 187

²² *Harvard College Class of 1881 secretary's report III*, Rand Avery Co. , p. 10

²³ Getlein, p. 146, 164; *Convention journal and the diocesan canons*, The Diocese, 1890, Volume 100, p. 42

²⁴ Getlein, pp. 164-5

²⁵ Getlein, p. 168

²⁶ Getlein, pp. 183, 168-9, p. 194

²⁷ *Trinity Church Parish Profile*, August 2010, Trinity church Archives, <http://www.trinitynewhaven.org/Portals/0/Search%20Committee/pdfs/TrinityParishProfileSmall7.pdf>, accessed May 21, 2011.

²⁸ Getlein, Chapter 15, p. 206

²⁹ *Trinity Church Parish Profile*

³⁰ Jarvis, Lucy, *Sketches*, pp. 26-7

³¹ Beardsley, *The History of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut*, Volume 1, pp. 117, 136. Also Jarvis, Lucy, *Sketches*, p. 162, Rockey, John L. *History of New Haven County, Connecticut*, W. W. Preston, 1892 Volume 2, p. 340.

³² Jarvis, Lucy, *Sketches*, p. 165. See also Andrews, William Given, *A History of Christ Episcopal Church in Guilford, Connecticut*, The Press of the Echo, 1895, p. 25

³³ Andrews, p. 30

³⁴ Jarvis, Lucy, *Sketches*, pp. 27, 60, 61. Also, Prichard, Sarah, *The Town and City of Waterbury*, Price and Lee Company, 1896, Volume 1, p. 650, and Dexter, Franklin Bowditch, *Biographical sketches*, Volume 1, p. 687.