

Building Bridges 2021 Convention Report

Despite the pandemic challenges, Building Bridges continues to thrive: sustaining its existing nine local veteran luncheon sites, and expanding the initiative with two more sites beyond the boundaries of the Diocese—one at Christ Church, Swansea, in the Diocese of Massachusetts, and the other, across the border in Keene, New Hampshire. Outdoor veteran lunches continue in Greenfield, Northampton, Chicopee, and indoor lunches are being held at Grace Lutheran and Good Shepherd, West Springfield, Saint David's in Agawam, and the Elks Lodge in Pittsfield. The Building Bridges sites in Baldwinville, South Deerfield and Leominster are in temporary abeyance, with the intention of reopening when deemed appropriate.

Recognizing the different needs of post-9/11 veterans, Building Bridges is also undertaking a strategic plan to pivot the initiative toward serving this younger demographic. We are about to pilot a “pod project,” attached to specific luncheon sites. Bringing together Gulf War veterans with those who served in prior wars, we are hoping to create mentorships to the betterment of both.

With an eye to financial sustainability, Building Bridges has engaged a media consultant to more fully develop a free social media platform—specifically, the Building Bridges website and Facebook pages. Using digital technology to coalesce the individual communities, it will also enable Building Bridges veterans to stay in touch between meetings. Wirth the goal of addressing veteran social isolation, and promoting suicide prevention, I am deeply grateful to the Diocese for this ministry of the Church.

Respectfully Submitted,
The Rev. Christopher Carlisle
Director, Building Bridges Veterans Initiative
The Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts