

## **Building Bridges 2022 Convention Report**

In what we hope are the late stages of the Pandemic, Building Bridges continues to rapidly expand in New England. Now thirteen communities strong—gathering veterans for breakfast, lunch, and dinner in four dioceses—the initiative, mandated by Bishop Fisher ten years ago, has thanked our veterans for their service by serving 75,000 meals. Its latest launch was at the Church of the Reconciliation, Webster, preceded by its first LGBTQ+ site in Northampton.

In recognition of the rapidly changing veteran population, Building Bridges is increasingly focused on post-9/11 veterans. The first pilot site, specifically dedicated to this younger demographic, is planned for Saint Albans, Vermont, with its younger veteran population. One of the Building Bridges taglines is, “We’re changing the conversation,” alongside: “It’s the easiest door for a veteran to open.”

Accompanying its ongoing fundraising—both site-based and by way of philanthropic foundations—has been a beer campaign in collaboration with “The Peoples Pint” in Greenfield. “Building Bridges New England IPA,” otherwise known as “The Bridge,” has exceeded expectations, currently in its third brewing batch. The Building Bridges team is actively pursuing Veterans Administration grants focused on suicide prevention and addressing veteran social isolation.

The name “Building Bridges” came from a conversation with a social worker employed by a veteran organization also seeking to help veterans. When asked what he thought the church could do that no other organization could do, he memorably replied: “Build bridges back into their own communities. With their local roots, churches could help veterans to combat their isolation from the very communities they risked their lives to protect.”

Hence, Jesus’s ministry uncannily comes to the fore: to bring the wounded and the marginalized back into fold of God. As always, parishes are invited to hear the Building Bridges story, and to entertain the possibility of hosting a monthly meal. And as always, Building Bridges continues to be deeply grateful to the Diocese for caring for those who have risked their lives for us, and who now need us.

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