



Press Release

The Episcopal Diocese of Georgia

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE *December 12, 2011*

Christ Church Episcopal Takes Possession of Property

With a transfer of keys, historic Christ Church on Johnson Square in Savannah came back into the possession of Christ Church Episcopal. Earlier today, Mimi Jones and Margaret Miller, the top lay leaders with the Episcopal congregation met privately with Joan Malley, the Parish Administrator of the departing congregation, where Malley handed off the keys to the property, in keeping with the recent ruling of the Georgia Supreme Court. Once the keys were in hand, the wardens walked silently into the church to pray. After a time of prayer, other members of Christ Church Episcopal arrived and were met by the Rev. Michael White, the parish's rector, to pray at the altar before beginning work.

"This transition of possession of the property was necessary and right, but it is not easy on anyone," Bishop Scott Benhase said. He added, "We continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ in the departing congregation. We thank God that all have been gracious and that the turnover has gone as smoothly as possible."

White said, "Thankfully, this has been a very cordial, grace-filled process. It is my prayer that this is the beginning of a new chapter in God's calling for each of the two congregations."

The first worship services in the historic building on Johnson Square will be held this Sunday, December 18th. The 8 a.m. Eucharist will be a spoken service followed by a choral Eucharist at 10:30 a.m. The Rev. Michael White will be the preacher for both services. In the meantime, the congregation's transition team is now assessing the condition of the buildings and has already begun contracting out work on some deferred maintenance issues. The largest single project will be to install a new HVAC system in the historic church, which will remove the cause of several maintenance concerns with that structure. Work on pressure washing and painting is also planned to start this week.

The church property dispute began in 2007 when the departing congregation's rector and vestry asserted that Christ Church would become affiliated with the Church of Uganda under the control of one of its bishops. This occurred after the former rector and members of the vestry, without prior notice to the Episcopal Bishop of Georgia or the congregation, changed the Church's articles of incorporation to remove any reference to The Episcopal Church. The

breakaway group then attempted to disavow the parish's more than 200-year history as a part of The Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Georgia.

In a 6-1 decision released on November 21, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled that the Diocese of Georgia holds the property in trust for the congregation affiliated with The Episcopal Church. The majority opinion said, "The record shows that at all times during the 180 years before this dispute began, Christ Church acted consistently with the Episcopal Church's canons regarding its property, demonstrating the local church's understanding that it could not consecrate, alienate, or encumber - much less leave with - its property without the consent of the parent church."

Christ Church, founded in 1733 shortly after the arrival of General James Oglethorpe and the original colonists, is known as the "Mother Church of Georgia" and is one of the oldest churches in the State of Georgia.