

INTRODUCTION

City Engagement at Park Street Church, Boston

www.parkstreet.org

City Context

Boston is currently experiencing a renaissance. After decades of decline, our city is in the midst of its most significant burst of population growth, reflecting the world-wide trend of urbanization. The government's projection of growth (imagine.boston.gov) indicates increases that will radically shift the racial, ethnic, and cultural composition of the city. Mixed land-use development in the Downtown Crossing area and new developments in the Seaport region have already witnessed thousands of new residents within walking distance of Park Street Church. Boston is also ranked in the top 25 'Global Elite' cities of the world in 2022 in terms of innovation, human capital, information exchange and business (kearney.com).

Park Street Church recognizes both the opportunities and the threats that these trends have for gospel ministry in the city. Our leadership is also mindful of the tremendous suffering that surrounds the church. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, has exacerbated existing inequalities across the community. Housing, mental health, educational opportunity, discrimination, and many other issues have had a disproportionately negative impact on members of our community who are lower income, less educated, or ethnically diverse. For those new to the city and those newly searching for a spiritual home, we realize that life-giving biblical proclamation, transformative community groups, and powerful worship will be vital. Furthermore, practical acts of love and kindness to those who live in the city through ministries of compassion and mercy will illustrate to newcomers and long-time neighbors that Christ called us to live out the gospel using our heads, hearts, and hands. Such witness in deed and word to both the least and the highest amongst us can provide a disarmingly attractive apologetic to those who are disillusioned, distracted or disinterested in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Church Overview

Park Street Church is a Protestant Church in the heart of Boston. It affirms that Jesus is above all. The church's very architecture is a historic public witness to Jesus' declaration that "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). Since its founding by twelve women and fourteen men in 1809, it has affirmed the authority of Scripture alone, justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. As a fellowship of sinners saved by grace, the church has a rich legacy of missions, Christian education, and evangelism and has had an enduring impact on the nation as well as overseas. Today, about a thousand people regularly worship across three services on a Sunday at the church. It is a church seeking to make disciples who become like Jesus together. We seek to do this by the ministry of the Holy Spirit through worship, instruction/catechesis, mission and community.

Examples of City Engagement

- *Home at Park Street*: Over the past 15 years or more, Park Street Church has served our unhoused neighbors through a food and clothing ministry on the Boston Common. In the past 5 years this ministry relocated within the church facility itself. Various initiatives have been developed to assist this population through medical, legal, housing, employment, and other resources.
- *New Afghan Neighbors*: In 2021 Park Street Church helped to resettle 7 families across the Greater Boston area who were evacuated from Afghanistan. More than 200 congregants served on neighborhood teams to offer logistical support and develop relationships with these new neighbors, acting as their new, extended families. We continue to support these families and foster community among them and with other local Afghan families.
- *City Engagement Grant Writing Team*: Securing funds for partner organizations in Boston initiated during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to secure funding for emergency relief services for partner churches, we continue to support local churches and faith-based organizations who serve the vulnerable in their neighborhoods, by writing grant applications for funding.
- *Partner ministries in the city*: Boston Center for Pregnancy Choices, Alive in Christ, Amirah, Boston Trinity Academy, Park Street School
- *Communities of Missional Practice*: An initiative to build a model of missional small groups focused on particular vocational callings, city needs, etc. A video teaching/study series was developed and tested by several groups. The development of these groups was largely stalled due to the pandemic.
- *COVID-19 Emergency Relief*: A response to the critical hunger needs in the areas of Boston hit most hard by COVID-19-related layoffs, Park Street Church ran several initiatives. 1) congregants sewed thousands of masks, distributing them to care homes, hospitals, homeless shelters; 2) food/money/logistics provided to local churches & organizations running food pantries or serving the homeless; 3) a grant writing team established to secure funds for food pantries; 4) a food bank established at the church supplying 2,000lbs./week; 5) in collaboration with local healthcare organizations, managed technology, logistics & communication for a city-wide emergency food distribution through local churches for isolated COVID-19 patients – worked with churches running food pantries primarily in Mattapan, Revere and East Boston, and Boston Healthcare for the Homeless. Small groups of 8-10 were dedicated to each food pantry, providing what the churches told us they needed: e.g., a website to provide resource lists, money to buy food, supplemental food supply, storage/refrigeration equipment, food packing, distribution help. Park Street Church set up its own food bank, with regular teams of volunteers including many families, weighing, and packing up to 2,000 lbs./week. Congregants also tutored out-of-school kids at a minority sister church, designed entrepreneurship training for youths, and secured grants for partner food pantries across Boston.

· *Park Street School* (Toddler-K6) & *Boston Trinity Academy* (K6-12): In the last two decades Individuals and families from Park Street Church have established two schools in the city to address some of the educational needs of families in the city.

Emerging Programs

· *Returning Citizens*: In the past 6 months, the church has started to explore opportunities to serve returning citizens (former prisoners in Massachusetts who have been released to re-enter society) in the city of Boston. Approximately 2000 returning citizens are released each year to the Boston area. We have yet to commit to this area of ministry.

END

5/18/2023