

News

from Center Church on the Green in New Haven, United Church of Christ

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Center Church on the Green Gives Free Tours of Historic Crypt; Monologue of Ann Eaton; and “613 Radical Acts of Prayer” as part of New Haven’s International Festival of Arts & Ideas

NEW HAVEN, CT (June 2008) – New Haven’s Center Church on the Green is offering three different activities as part of New Haven’s International Festival of Arts & Ideas, including free tours of the church’s historic Crypt, which boasts 137 famous gravestones of New Haven’s founders and earliest citizens dating back to 1687. The crypt tours will take place between 11 am – 1 pm on Saturday, June 21 and June 28 as well as on Thursday, June 19 and June 26.

At 1:15 pm, following each of the Saturday Crypt tours, Center Church’s pastor, the Rev. Sandra Olsen, will dress up in traditional Puritan attire and present a dramatic monologue of Ann Eaton, the wife of one of the founders of New Haven and the church. [see attached photo]

Center Church and United Church on the Green will also host the grand finale of “613 Radical Acts of Prayer,” a performance about spiritual and social action, at 7 pm on Saturday, June 28 in the Center Church sanctuary, known as The Meeting House. The event, run by The Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, features hundreds of citizen dancers.

“As New Haven’s oldest church, Center Church is proud to be an integral part of the International Arts and Ideas Festival,” said the Rev. Olsen. “A historical treasure of downtown New Haven, Center Church’s past is tightly entwined with the founding of New Haven itself. We look forward to helping people learn a bit about the city’s history with our crypt tours and dramatic monologues.”

The Center Church Crypt, which is built over a small portion of the town's burial ground, includes the remains of Theophilus Eaton, one of the founders of New Haven and the church.

Eaton was the governor of the New Haven Colony for 19 years. Margaret Arnold, the first wife of Benedict Arnold, as well as Sarah Rutherford Trowbridge, who has the oldest dated stone in the Crypt, are also buried in the Crypt. President Rutherford B. Hayes visited Center Church in 1880 and viewed the burial site of his grandmother and aunt, who are buried in The Crypt. The Crypt contains the identified remains of about 137 people, and the likely remains of over 1,000 that are unidentified. Crypt tours are given from April to October every Thursday, 11 am - 1 pm as well as Saturdays, 11 am - 1 pm.

The Rev. Olsen's dramatic 20-minute monologues, which will take place at 1:15 pm on Saturday, June 21 and 28, will capture the "feisty" and "strong-willed" personality of the wife of New Haven's governor, Ann Yale Eaton. Ann Eaton was also the grandmother of Elihu Yale, for whom Yale College (now University) was named.

"Ann Eaton was an intelligent and non-traditional woman who was well ahead of her time," said the Rev. Olsen. "In a day when women were regarded as secondary to men, Ann Eaton made her voice heard, to the point that she was eventually excommunicated from the church. She didn't think she would, or should, get reprimanded for voicing her theological opinions—especially as she was the governor's wife—but she was. Even still, she continued to speak her piece."

Center Church on the Green, a congregation of the United Church of Christ (UCC), has been located on the New Haven Green for the past 370 years and is a registered New Haven Connecticut Landmark. The Church is well known for its crypt, which is built over a small portion of the town's burial ground and includes 137 famous gravestones of New Haven's founders and earliest citizens dating back to 1687. The Church is actively involved in its community, offering space and assistance to the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, as well as involved in Columbus House, Hill Health Center's The Baby's Closet, and Christian Community Action & AIDS Interfaith Network. For more information about the church or services, visit NewHavenCenterChurch.org or call 203-787-0121.