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Faith Congregational Church Returns Home September 29

Church to Mark 200th anniversary with outdoor celebration at its former location at the corner of Talcott and Market Streets

(HARTFORD, CT: September 18, 2019) Past, present and hopes for the future will meet at the corner of Talcott and Market Streets in Downtown Hartford on Sunday, September 29. Faith Congregational Church (formerly Talcott Street Congregational Church) will celebrate its 200th Anniversary with a special outdoor ceremony on the site where the church was located for 128 years. The anniversary celebration will also mark the renewal of a drive to create a permanent memorial to the Talcott Street Church and its vital and inspiring role in the history of both Hartford and the nation.

The ceremony will start promptly at 2 pm. Faith's history as a leader in the fight for social, economic and racial justice will be told in words and song by church members and a combined choir from Faith, Center Church and Immanuel Congregational Church. A keynote address will be delivered by Beverly Morgan-Welch from the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of African American History and Culture. A reception will follow the ceremony from 3:30-5:30 pm at Connecticut's Old State House. The event was made possible in major part by Connecticut Humanities.

The old Talcott Street Congregational Church building was torn down in the 1950s during the series of urban renewal projects that virtually eliminated Hartford's old Eastside neighborhood. The site was occupied by a parking garage, which has since been closed. Talcott Church was forgotten by all but a few local historians and members of Faith until 1991, when artist Mel Chin erected a temporary structure resembling the old church on its former site. The Faith Congregational Choir sang at the opening of the art project, which had been commissioned by Real Art Ways, and the event was covered by the Associated Press and National Public Radio as well as local media.

Now Faith Congregational and Real Art Ways are working together again, along with the Hartford History Center at Hartford Public Library, Connecticut's Old State House, Capital Community College and others to create a permanent memorial to Talcott Street Church. The cause has taken on additional impetus because the long abandoned site is slated for redevelopment.

The history of the church stretches back to 1819, when several African American members of First Church Congregational (now Center Church) grew tired of being assigned seats in the rear and upper galleries of the church. This small group soon formed a church of their own, the African American Religious Society of Hartford. It was the first African-American Congregational Church in Connecticut

and the second in the nation. In 1826, the church moved to the corner of Talcott and Market Streets, where it would remain for 128 years.

Following the Civil War and well into the 20th century, the church grew and cemented its position as one of the main pillars of Hartford's African American community. In 1953, the church merged with Mother Bethel Methodist Church and adopted its present name, Faith Congregational Church. A year later, it moved to its present building at 2030 Main Street. Since then, it has continued the battle for social justice on many fronts and has also served as an incubator for numerous political and community leaders.

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Now celebrating its 125th year, Hartford Public Library remains at the forefront of redefining the urban library experience in the 21st Century. With seven locations throughout the city, the library provides education, intellectual enrichment and cultural development for thousands of children, youth and adults every year. Hartford Public Library has also gained local and national recognition for its wide range of new initiatives and partnerships designed to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic city and region, including immigration services, employment assistance and youth leadership training. Please visit www.hplct.org.

About the Hartford History Center

The Hartford History Center at Hartford Public Library is the museum and archive for the library. It holds a growing multi-media compilation of more than 500,000 books, maps, photographs, works of art, digital assets and municipal records that uniquely convey the 300-plus years of community life in Connecticut's capital city. Officially named in 1945, the archives and special collections of Hartford Public Library date back to the 17th century.

Sources:

"Faith Congregational Church: 185 Years – Same People, Same Purpose," by Tamara Verrett, *Connecticut Explored*, Summer 2005

"Downtown Hartford's Derelict One Talcott Plaza Headed for Redevelopment," by Kenneth Gosselin, *Hartford Courant*, February 12, 2018