



[Image Description: Two people in winter jackets walk side by side down a path on a winter day in Boston Common. They appear to be walking towards a statue of George Washington on horseback and the Boston skyline is visible in the background. Snow covers the area surrounding the cleared path and both figures wear drawstring backpacks that have a “Winter Walk” logo on them.]

Photos from Winter Walk 2020 were taken by Chris Shane, Evgenia Eliseeva, Stewart Ting Chong & Belinda Soncini.

Don't Walk By **Episode 4** **Release Date: February 12, 2021**

Ari Barbanell: In the Spring of 1996, Reverend Debbie Little found herself in Boston Common thinking: *a building is not what makes a church - the people do.*

Reverend Little had dedicated her early years as a deacon to discovering what street ministry meant in practice to her. She'd frequently have conversations with people experiencing homelessness she'd encounter on her walks through parks and train stations.

And gradually, over cups of coffee and sandwiches, she and those she met began to form a community around a common interest in sharing stories, joining in prayer, and acknowledging each other's humanity.

[outdoor ambient sound comes in – voices chattering in the distance]

By Easter Sunday of 1996, sixteen people had gathered around Brewer's fountain in Boston Common for the very first common cathedral service led by Reverend Little.

At the end of a successful outdoor service, Reverend Little hoped they might do it again the next Easter. But as the group parted ways, she didn't hear "see you next year," she heard, "See you next Sunday!"

[soft music comes in]

Amanda Grant-Rose: *We have been meeting for 25 years. We have not missed a day.*

AB: That's Amanda Grant-Rose. She has served as the Executive Director of common cathedral since 2014.

Over the last 25 years, common cathedral has continued to grow into a flourishing community. And in addition to holding an outdoor service every Sunday, common cathedral offers enriching programs indoors with the same consistency.

AGR: *We have not missed a Sunday. We have not missed a Common Art. We have not missed a Boston Warm. We will continue to gather. Even if you get housed, you still have a community to come to.*

[music fades out]

AB: In early winter, I visited Emmanuel Church on Newbury Street, where indoor programming is held.

As soon as I walk in, there's always a warm hello...

[ambient noise from Ari's visit to common cathedral. In the background Amanda says, "Come on in!"]

...and the sound of fresh coffee brewing...

[ambient noise continues with sound of coffee percolating quietly in the background]

...and the delicious smell of homemade soup, made by Ten.

Ten: *Hello! My name is Ten.*

AB: Ten is a community member at common cathedral. He's a sweet, kind soul. He always greets you with a smile and a wave and embodies what common cathedral means to so many people.

[soft music comes in]

AGR: *Ten comes in every time that we open up those doors. And he's there to help put out the tables and the chairs. He's there to make their coffee. He is there because he loves the people that sleep out on the streets because he once slept out on the streets.*

And he knows the power of coming into a community that will love him unconditionally. And he is now doing that for people who desperately need it.

AB: For Ten and so many others, common cathedral offers relief from isolation, the opportunity to connect with others, and a chance to give back to the community that's nurtured you.

[soft music fades out]

AGR: *In the morning when we open up the doors, not only does the paid staff come in, but our community comes in. They come in from sleeping on the streets, or maybe they're newly housed, but they come in together and we create the space. We create the community together.*

[theme music comes in]

It's not just those with housing and doing for those without. Anything that we're doing, we are doing because our congregation, our community has said, 'This is important to me, and I want to help make it happen.'

AB: I'm Ari Barbanell. And this is Don't Walk By.

[theme music continues] [montage begins - speakers share in quick succession: Ten says, "Am I an artist? Um... yeah! According to some people, they consider me as an artist." Amanda says, "Together we're building not only our programs, but a community that loves each other deeply] [theme fades out]

AB: By definition, a common belongs to everyone. It's shaped by all and can be anything: a space to congregate, to build community, to share and give back. And that spirit is exactly what's reflected in a typical week at common cathedral.

AGR: *On Sundays, we gather at the Boston Commons right in front of Brewer's Fountain, where we have lunch for 150 people at 12:30 followed by an ecumenical worship at one o'clock.*

AB: And during the rest of the week, things are just as busy.

Ten: We have... four different programs.

AB: Here's Ten again.

Ten: Like Mondays and Fridays, people can just come in. And then... especially it's meant for the people living outside, so they can have a nice space. And then they can use the bathroom, and many of brothers and sisters who live outside there... so they don't get proper sleep. So, they can just come in and then take a rest.

AB: Ten is referring to the Boston Warm Day center run twice a week out of common cathedral. Boston Warm centers were established in 2015 in response to the closure of Boston Harbor's Long Island Bridge in 2014, which had provided Boston's only access to the city's largest homeless shelter and to private detox centers. And this had an incredibly damaging impact on our community, displacing more than 700 people relying on the essential services provided, including overnight shelter.

For people experiencing homelessness, overnight shelters of course provide beds and a warm place to sleep, but during the day guests are required to leave.

Ten: I was in a shelter like for one year, eight months or something. So, you have to come out in the morning and then there's a certain fixed time that you have to go back. So, during the whole day, pretty much you're out.

AB: common cathedral at Emmanuel Church is among a handful of places in Boston that provides shelter for those in need of a comfortable place to spend the day.

St. Francis House, for example, is the largest day shelter in Massachusetts, offering shelter every day, year-round and serving an average of 500 people per day.

St. Francis House also provides overlapping basic, rehabilitative, and housing services for guests with continuous and comprehensive care.

Keeping the doors open regularly is also a priority for common cathedral aided by another dimension of care: offering the space to express yourself and to be heard.

[soft music comes in]

Where all are welcomed and unconditionally loved.

One of common cathedral's core programs, common art, is summed up beautifully through words written by Reverend Little and Amanda:

For most members, common art is a singular chance to express their artistic gifts. For some, art is a professional path, interrupted and suspended by calamity and homelessness. For others, it's an opportunity to express unheard opinions, ideas and truths. For others, it's pure joy, an oasis of form and color in otherwise dry times. For all, it's a simple and welcome relief from daily difficulty. For many common art members, art is a way of life. For others, it's a new discovery. But for all, art is passion, expressing and affirming life itself, a defiant or gentle "yes" in the face of stigma amid the constant struggle of poverty and homelessness.

Ten: *common arts, the second program happens on Wednesdays. Basically, people come here to do artworks. Like different artworks, like painting, bead making, jewelry, and stained glass, tailoring. Sometimes also we have different projects like origami. And some music also sometimes. So basically, it's an art program and it comes under the umbrella of common cathedral.*

AB: For Ten, finding common cathedral and participating in programs like common art has been transformative.

Ten: *Am I an artist? Um... yeah! According to some people, they consider me as an artist. [amused]*

I never really realized that I can paint. And then, first time I knew that I can do something with the painting... with the colors, it was 2016, I guess. So, that was the year I'd been introduced to common cathedral, at common arts.

AB: Ten was introduced to the common cathedral community after a major turning point in his life.

Ten: *I came to this country alone. I left all my family, my brothers, sisters, everybody. And a couple of my brothers, like my brothers, sisters, they are in other countries. Emotionally... I was kind of a little lonely.*

AB: Ten had recently immigrated to Boston from India. And soon after his move, he was met with a series of hardships.

Ten: *My work permit was expired. So, I couldn't work. So that meant I couldn't afford to pay my rent.*

AB: Without an income, the life Ten had worked so hard to build for himself quickly began to unravel.

[soft piano music comes in]

He moved out of his apartment and with nowhere else to go, found himself on the streets.

Ten: *I was out in front of a church two days... that was my first two days out in the street. And I was pretty new also in this country. And it was so scary. Like it was really, really scary...*

AB: Ten was at his most vulnerable, not only physically - living without shelter - but emotionally as well. And the two go hand in hand.

Ten: *The sense of insecurity that you get, you know, like it's overwhelming. You feel so insecure. My thought was how lucky you are, like, if you have your own place, how safe you feel.*

AB: This was Ten's first time experiencing homelessness and after some time on the street, he started finding the resources he needed. Little by little, he began to rebuild his life.

Ten: *I was living in Holy Family, one of the men's shelter. So, and... yeah, I was waiting for my papers, legal papers, and then, my hearing in the court. So, I wasn't doing much... like legally, I wasn't working. So, I had a lot of time to do some volunteer work or do some project.*

AB: That's when Ten met former common cathedral pastor, Reverend Laura Shatzer.

Ten: *She asked me about my background and then I told her, 'Yeah, I used to be a chef. And then I also worked as a teacher and also as a general manager in a hotel.' And then she said, 'Yeah, actually we are looking for somebody who can take care of the kitchen, to cook for us.' I say, 'Yeah, absolutely. I would love to do that.' So, that's how I got associated with common cathedral.*

AB: In finding a community within common cathedral, Ten began to feel free to be himself again.

In addition to the support of the common cathedral community, Ten credits the consistent programming and routine he's established in helping him come out of a period of depression.

Ten: *Boredom is one of the worst thing that, you know, elevate your depression. I always want to be busy, do something like more constructive, productive.*

It used to be almost like five days a week, almost like full-time job. And then that really, kept me busy because if I'm not cooking, I do some painting. And then yeah, you can connect to a lot of people. It's a good thing that you can practice your patience, your tolerance. Because many of our guests they live outside and then it's so easy for them to snap because things are not on your side – you live on the edge. You empathize pretty much like their situation. And then, it helps

you to grow spiritually. And you become a much better person. And then that really gave me a soft corner in my heart. I mean, I look at people, like, all of the staff and the volunteers, almost like a family member. So, you have this kind of natural closeness that grows in your heart.

AB: One of the reasons common cathedral has had over two decades of successful programming and engagement is that sense of closeness cultivated by community members. And that spirit encourages people to give back.

Now that he's housed, Ten continues to find ways to use his skills to uplift his community.

[music fades out]

Ten: *Many people, especially the guys, they cannot afford to pay the barber to get a haircut. So, since I love doing any part of, you know, like artworks, somebody asked me, 'Can you do a haircut' since I have a clipper, and I said 'Yeah' because I did it a couple of times when I was in school. I said, 'Okay, let me try. It's kind of easy.' So, I watched some YouTube videos. Nobody's born as a barber. Nobody's born as a chef. Nobody's born like anything because you learn after you are born. You learn everything in this life, so why not? And then I tried and then people really appreciate it. They said, 'Wow. It's an amazing haircut.' So, last week I gave haircut to two people. So, that also helps because they told me, 'You have to pay 20 bucks in a barbershop to do a haircut. So, we cannot afford that.' And he came to pay me five bucks. I said like, 'You can keep it because I know five bucks is the only money you have. I don't need that.'*

AB: As we sat at a distance in the library of Emmanuel Church, I asked Ten what he'd say if he could share anything with the Winter Walk community.

Ten: *As a message to people who never experience homelessness: the sense of security that is homeless people... even when I was homeless, I experienced, was overwhelming. If you are broke, a dollar means a lot for you. At least a dollar you can buy a coffee or donut. But when you get enough money, a dollar means nothing. When you are housed, when you have a home, you don't feel how they feel it. Because for you, the normal thing in your life is to have everything. Everything you take it for granted. But when you are deprived of certain things... let's say, one day you don't have hot shower – how do you feel? You crave for that hot shower because you don't have it, right? But every day we take it for granted. So, we never realize life is very different for so many underprivileged people.*

This country I would say is very blessed because there are so many organizations like common cathedral, they reach out to people who are homeless, who are in the street. And there are so many programs giving mind especially the privileged people.

[theme music comes in]

If I hadn't come in contact with common cathedral, so many things... like my bending, like my barber skill... wouldn't have realized. Now I would say these are more of wisdom than knowledge. common cathedral became a blessing in disguise.

AB: common cathedral is a testament to what happens when people show up for each other every day and when services and programs are developed *by and for* the community. common cathedral is not only a church, it's also a community center, an art studio, a place to get warm, to get food. And to feed not only your body, but your spirit.

[theme music continues]

Next episode, we'll hear from a Veteran on his experience with homelessness and how he "came out the other side."

Don't Walk By is a podcast brought to you by Winter Walk Boston - an event and initiative raising awareness and funds towards an end to homelessness in Greater Boston.

Episodes are written and produced by Isabel Hibbard.

Audio production and sound design is by Kevin O'Connell.

This episode was made in partnership with common cathedral.

You can learn more about any of the organizations mentioned in the episode and how you can help at winterwalkboston.org.

I'm Ari Barbanell, the Executive Director of Winter Walk and your host.

Thanks for listening.

[music fades out]

END OF EPISODE.

