

By Emily E. Gifford

For decades during the mid-20th century, from his offices at Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford and in the field, Canon Clinton Jones worked diligently to help members of Hartford's gay community, including transgendered men and transsexuals seeking gender reassignment surgery, in any way he could, from individual counseling to assistance dealing with employment and housing discrimination. On occasion, he opened his home to people whose sexual identity had left them, literally, with nowhere else to go. In helping those who, in the 1960s, were considered among "the least" of society, Jones was a progressive, even revolutionary figure, yet one who presented himself to the world as a kindly, mild-mannered, and nearly Victorian cleric.

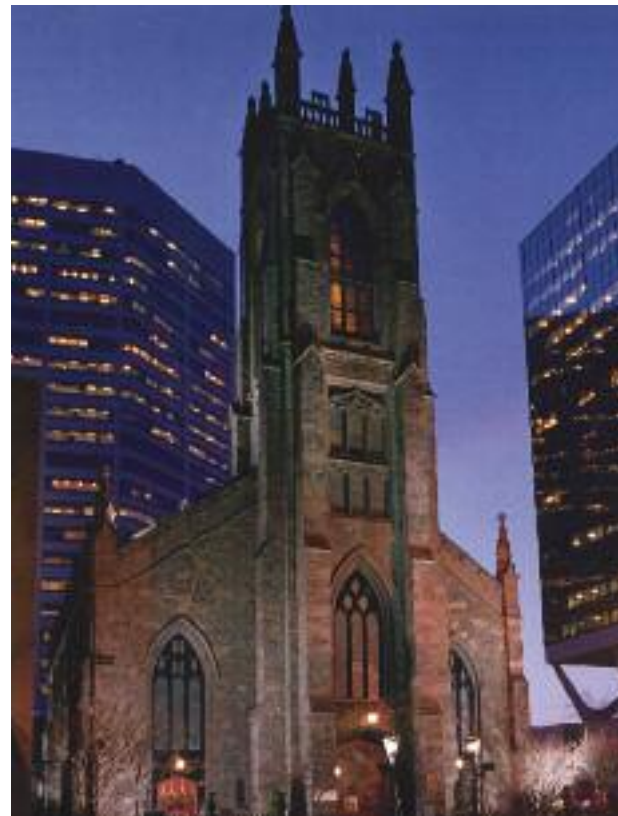
Jones was born in Brookfield, Connecticut, on November 16, 1916, to Clinton Robert Jones and Henriette Elizabeth Morehouse Jones. In later years, he remembered his childhood in rural, bucolic Brookfield, a small town between Danbury and New Milford: "My father had a large farm; we had cattle, chickens, all sorts of things...raised vegetables, sold them, things like that."

Jones's family was well established in Brookfield. His mother's family had been among the founding parishioners of St. Paul's Episcopal Church there in the 18th century. His mother served as the church organist, encouraging her son to view church attendance and religious participation as a natural part of life. Jones was also inspired by an early role model, Charles Carpenter, the Episcopal priest serving at St. Paul's, whom Jones later described as a "gentle, kind pastor."

Jones graduated from Brookfield's one-room schoolhouse to attend Danbury High School. While his mother hoped that he would attend Yale University to study law, Jones began looking at other possibilities for his future after she died in 1933, when he was a junior in high school. He chose to attend Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. He was attracted to the school because, as he reflected in an oral history

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St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Brookfield, Jones's boyhood church.
Brookfield Historical Society



Christ Church Cathedral, Hartford, where Jones served for 40 years.
Friends of Christ Church Cathedral, CCSU, Elihu Burritt Library, GLBTQ Archives

An Early Advocate for Connecticut's Gay Community

Clinton Jones, c. 1960-1965.
Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut



The Rev. Canon Clinton Jones and students, Connecticut Churchman, 1952. Early in his career, Jones proved adept at revitalizing the church's youth programming. Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut

interview conducted in 2002, Bard "had a whole new educational program, which was very, very modern, very liberal."

Again speaking in his 2002 interview, Jones recounted his calling to the ministry: "Little by little...by the end of my second year [of college], I began to think [the ministry was] the way I should go." After graduating, Jones attended General Theological Seminary in New York, completing his studies in 1941, when he was 24. He served as a chaplain in the Maritime Commission in New London for a year before moving in 1946 to Hartford, where he joined the staff at Christ Church Cathedral.

Within two years, Jones was appointed a senior administrative priest, or canon, of the church. As Canon Jones of Christ Church Cathedral, he had a significant role in church administration and broad latitude in defining his own duties. The first major project Jones tackled in his new position was revitalizing the Episcopal Church's summer youth programs in

the Hartford area. He proved so adept at the work that he eventually administered church summer youth programs throughout southern New England.

Jones was a highly intelligent and resourceful man, and, once he had sorted out the youth programs, no one at Christ Church Cathedral was quite sure what he should turn his hand to next. In the early 1960s he began working on the Rehabilitation Committee of the Greater Hartford Council of Churches, a group that studied a variety of issues, including the lack of local resources to treat drug addiction and the problems of helping people make the transition from long-term in-patient treatment for mental illnesses back to day-to-day life.

As reported in a profile of Jones published in *The Hartford Courant* in 1986, and further detailed in his 2002 interview, while Jones was working with the Rehabilitation Committee, he heard that a homosexual janitor at an East Hartford school had been accused of molesting a boy and was consequently fired. Jones,

after making sure the student's well-being was attended to, was concerned that the man had been accused because he was gay rather than because he was guilty. Looking back on the incident in 2002, Jones offered no opinion about the janitor's guilt. Rather, he described his own investigation into the situation as spurring him to action on behalf of Hartford area "sexual minorities," to use Jones's preferred term, one that emphasized his belief that gay and transgendered people should be accepted as a natural part of society.

The Rehabilitation Committee began to study and explore issues related to homosexuality, but Jones and other members realized that there were so many matters to be addressed that a new committee was needed. The group quietly found volunteers, including Trinity College psychology professor George Higgins and attorney Donald Cantor. Discretion was definitely the watchword. When the sub-committee first met, at the Hartford YMCA, they used only the word "homosexuality" to direct members to the right meeting room. The YMCA, concerned about how such signs might look to others, asked them to come up with a more discreet name. The group decided that "Project H" was a sufficiently vague name. Project H members, including Higgins and Cantor, noted that most passers-by automatically assumed that the project was dealing with problems associated with heroin. In later years, Jones and other members of Project H would remember that story as a prime example of how clandestine people had to be about the topic of homosexuality. There were other similar incidents. In a letter inviting committee members to a dinner at which a representative of the George W. Henry Foundation, a New York City social service group for homosexuals and transsexuals, would speak, the committee chair, Robert Casstevens, cautioned, "*We do not want publicity* since at this point we are not prepared to deal with questions and inquiries" [emphasis in the original].

Jones was particularly impressed with the Henry Foundation, which was founded in the aftermath of World War II as gay men leaving the military gravitated to New York and other cities. The foundation provided its clients with both practical help with discrimination and legal issues and individual counseling. In 1965, Jones founded a Hartford chapter of the foundation; he seems to have been unique in the country in pursuing such an association. Keith Brown,

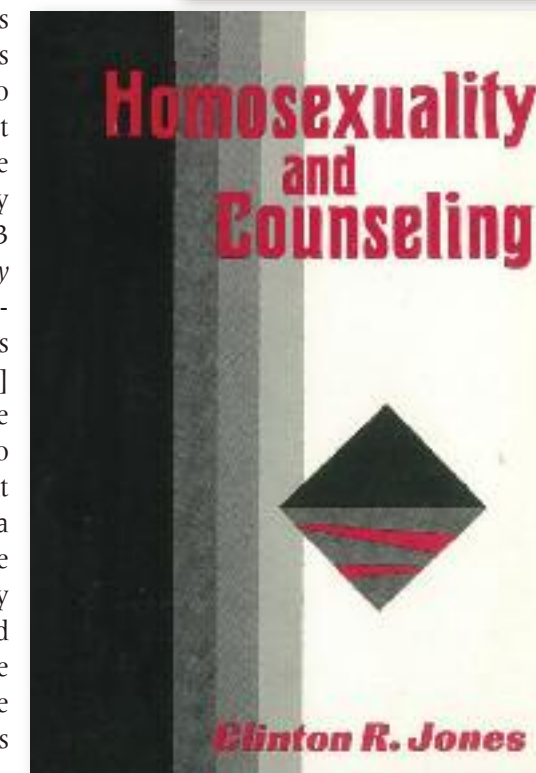
a pioneer of the gay rights movement in Hartford, later noted, "I don't remember a period of similar Henry Foundation cells doing counseling work in other parts of the country." The historical record supports Brown's impression.

In addition to trying to help the foundation increase its scope beyond New York, Jones, on a personal level, sought to increase his skills as a church counselor and refine his own religious view on homosexuality by pursuing a master's degree in sacred theology at New York Theological Seminary. His thesis, *Counseling and the Male Homosexual*, reflects the synthesis of his two main concerns in improving his work.

Although instances in which mainstream religious institutions and leaders responded publicly to homosexuality were not especially abundant in the 1960s, neither were they completely absent. A 1963 article in *Christian Century* addressed the issue, characterizing homosexuals as either "sinful" or "sick [and] unreasonable." This attitude was completely opposite to Jones's, who believed that homosexuality was not a disease. His belief about the origins of homosexuality might be best characterized by the more modern phrase "born that way." As we would only later learn, Jones himself was homosexual.

Some other clergy members shared his belief, or at least his view that homosexuals should not be rejected by the church solely on the basis of their sexual orientation. In San Francisco, a group of Protestants in 1965 formed a committee that worked closely with gay rights groups in that city. Troy Perry, working in Los Angeles, went even farther in 1968, establishing the

Clinton R. Jones, *What About Homosexuality?* (Youth Forum Series, Vol. 21, 1972). Private collection



Clinton R. Jones, *Homosexuality and Counseling*, (Fortress Press, 1974). Private collection

Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) to create a welcoming denomination specifically for gay Christians. Although originally the vision of one man in one city, MCC would grow exponentially, with Hartford forming a congregation in 1973.

Jones, while optimistic about how churches might eventually respond to homosexual congregants, was aware of the low opinion many Christians had toward homosexuals (among those who concerned themselves with the issue at all). Many of the people whom he counseled were specifically distressed by feelings of being rejected by their churches. Jones collected papers and pamphlets issued by those church leaders who addressed homosexuality directly; the vast majority of these were condemnatory. Jones's personal papers, held at the GLBTQ Archives at Central Connecticut State University's Elihu Burritt Library, include both his personal notes and correspondence with people whom he sought to help and the few pamphlets and articles Jones was able to collect. Many of the latter documents contain colorful marginalia in which Jones flatly rejected some of the

conclusions his fellow clergymen had reached in exploring the issue of homosexuality.

Although Jones concentrated mostly on helping individual gay men and transsexuals, he kept himself informed about national gay rights organizations, most of which, in the 1960s, were much more circumspect than they would be in following decades. Jones also helped early gay rights groups on a local level. Keith Brown co-founded the Kalos Society, which was organized in 1968 and which Brown described, also in a 2002 oral history interview, as the first gay rights group in Connecticut. In 2002, Brown remembered that Jones had assisted with one important matter. Brown wanted Kalos to be a politically active group,

but other co-founders wanted the society to be a social organization or even a group-therapy provider. It didn't help that the few potential meeting spaces available to the group in Hartford were located in the back rooms of bars. Jones offered the society the use of his offices at Christ Church Cathedral for their early meetings, which helped keep society members on the political track Brown was hoping for.

Meanwhile, Project H continued its own work through the end of the 1960s and on into the 1980s, with Jones's help. In 1966 the committee received a complaint that the state prison in Somers had established Cell Block G to "house all the transvestites," as a social worker described it. By early 1967, Jones had negotiated a visit to the prison and a meeting with the warden, who explained that the segregation was to protect transvestites and homosexuals from the general inmate population. Separate, however, was not equal, with Cell Block G prisoners finding their access to prison yard exercise limited compared with that of the general population and having to eat dinner at 3:30 in the afternoon so as not to be seated with the others. Jones, while unable to persuade the prison to dismantle Cell Block G, began counseling individual prisoners, an aspect of his ministry that continued until his retirement.

As gay men, lesbians, and transsexuals began to have more opportunities to start their own organizations in the 1970s and beyond, Project H (renamed "Committee on Sexual Minorities" in 1980) found that the gay community needed its services less and less. When Jones retired from the Episcopal Church in 1986, the committee disbanded.

Jones clearly had a positive effect on the gay and transsexual communities in Hartford. In a 1983 *Hartford Courant* article about the difficulty of being openly gay in Hartford, Jones was acknowledged as "a patriarch of Hartford's gay culture." And yet his work was notably deficient in one area: work with the lesbian community. Part of the reason may have been that lesbians throughout the United States had, in the mid-1960s, largely divorced themselves from the male gay rights movement. A common complaint was that gay men treated lesbians with the same dismissiveness that women experienced in the broader American culture, expecting them to take minutes and fetch coffee while offering few opportunities to engage on a

more meaningful level. Jones never addressed the issue, but he was representative of a traditionally male organization and was a person who, while progressive, gave a first impression as a throwback to Victorian culture. George Higgins remembered receiving a panicked call from one transsexual teen, given shelter by Jones after she was thrown out of her parents' home, who was completely at sea when confronted with the formalized gentility of Jones's home, unused to his nightly practice of gathering in the drawing room for a glass of sherry before enjoying a formal dinner. More generally, Jones's domestic formality was so central to his character that it was mentioned prominently in his 2006 *Hartford Courant* obituary.

In addition to his Victorian outlook in some matters, Jones did not, at least during his research in the 1960s, seem to understand lesbianism as a phenomenon, as demonstrated by a passage from his *Homosexuality and Counseling* thesis. Jones wrote, in explaining why his work concentrated on male homosexuals, "the incidence of female homosexuality is less—some authorities suggest as much as fifty percent [less than among men]." Jones seems not to have personally undertaken much investigation into the subject nor questioned the conclusions of these "authorities."

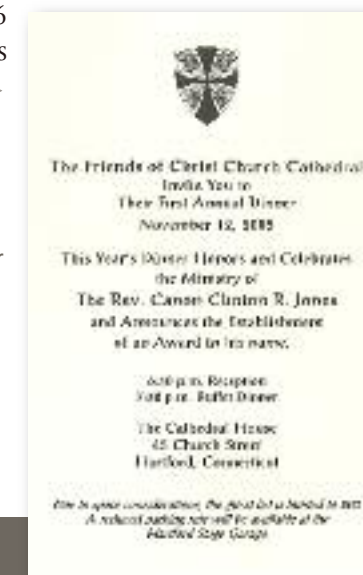
Nevertheless, it is indisputable that Jones was a hero to many gay men and transsexuals for his help and support on practical, psychological, and spiritual levels. As Project H and the Committee on Sexual Minorities moved to the background and groups within the LGBT rights movement began to operate with less "outside" help, Jones continued to contribute to the welfare of gays and transsexuals. In the early 1970s, he founded the Gender Identity Clinic of New England, a network of social workers and medical doctors who could provide transsexuals with counseling, evaluation, hormone therapy, and surgery. Jones began writing what he later referred to as "little books and things," including *Homosexuality and Counseling* and *Understanding Gay Relatives and Friends*, both released by religious publishing houses.

As Jones pursued his clerical career in aid of sexual minorities, he was not an entirely disinterested participant. Jones himself was gay, which may have led him to begin exploring the psychological, spiritual, and theological aspects of his sexuality long before Project H, as is indicated by the scope of his collected materials on the subject in his personal papers. Even so, Jones's colleagues never believed that Jones's homosexuality was the primary motivation for his work. Higgins suspected that Jones was gay, noting that for many decades Jones lived with Kenneth Woods, a church organist, but Higgins was never quite sure of, nor particularly concerned about, their exact relationship. Another Project H colleague was not aware of Jones's homosex-

uality until 2011; upon finding out, he simply shrugged his shoulders and said, "He'd have done the same things anyway," a sentiment Higgins shared. Jones and Woods had a 40-year domestic partnership that ended only with Jones's death in 2006.

Jones's personal papers do not include most of the letters he received from people he had helped, but one letter he kept read, in part, "I can't expect that you remember me...." But the writer wanted Jones to know that "I still appreciate your care and wanted you to know that I also benefitted from reading *Understanding Gay Friends and Relatives*." As American society became more open about discussing issues related to sexual minorities, Jones's work began to receive recognition, including the positive 1986 *Hartford Courant* profile, shortly before he retired. After his retirement, he continued to encourage Connecticut Episcopal churches to engage both with homosexuality as a topic and with individual gay men and transsexuals. In 2005, Christ Church Cathedral held a dinner in his honor, at which the cathedral announced the creation of a public service award bearing his name. Canon Clinton Jones died in June 2006 of pancreatic cancer; he was survived by Kenneth Woods. ➤

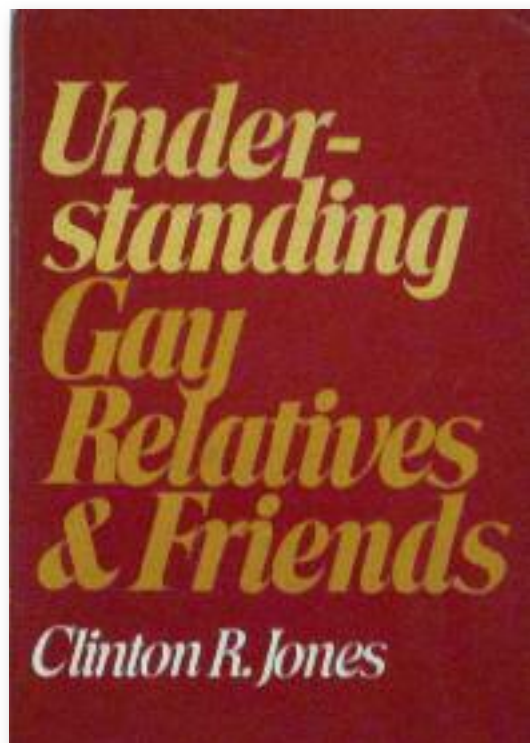
A Friends of Christ Church Cathedral invitation to a dinner in honor of the Rev. Canon Clinton R. Jones, 2005. CCSU Special Collections



Explore!

Central Connecticut State University houses the GLBTQ Archives, which include Canon Clinton Jones's papers, pulp novels from the 1950s to the 1990s featuring gay characters and themes, and memorabilia relating to the GLBTQ rights movement in Connecticut and beyond. The archives are open to the public; for more information visit <http://library.ccsu.edu/help/spcoll/equity/index.php>.

The 2002 oral history interview of Canon Clinton Jones is available online from the GLBTQ Digital Archives (<http://content.library.ccsu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/GLBTQ/id/19/rec/3>) along with other oral histories of Hartford-area gay rights activists, including Keith Brown.



Clinton R. Jones, *Understanding Gay Relatives and Friends* (Seabury Press, 1978). Private collection