

John N. Lewis

1869 - 1940

"He was rector of St. John's, but he belonged to all Waterbury. His kind and loving heart took in our entire community and everybody in it."

- Herbert Smith

John Neher Lewis, the Rector of St. John's Church for nearly forty years, was born in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York on January 18, 1869. He became widely known and loved for his benevolence and charitable work among those of every faith. There are few people who have contributed more to the religious, social and civic life of Waterbury.

Lewis graduated from Williams College, attended Berkley Divinity School and was ordained in 1892. He served various churches in the country before being called to Waterbury in 1900 as an assistant at St. John's. He was made rector the following year and continued as such until his death. The founder of the Waterbury Ministers' Association and rector for St Margaret's and Westover Schools, he became one of the best known clergy in the diocese and in many parts of the country.

Lewis believed in and succeeded in applying Christian principles outside his church. He was a constant visitor to the Poorhouse, city courts, jails and hospitals. Notable among the organizations he helped to found was the Visiting Nurses Association which was originally sponsored by St. John's. His concern for the homeless led him to turn over the old parish house as a shelter for them and the church ran a camp for their use on the outskirts of town, named appropriately Camp Lewis. He also established Vacation House, a resort on Lake Quassapaug for needy women and children. No charitable movement lacked his warm-hearted support and St. John's became the center of social services.

In civic affairs he was commissioner of Public Charities, director of the Connecticut Reformatory and Board of Parole, a member of the Waterbury Board of Relief, and the Housing Authority. He was chaplain of the fire and police departments, chairman of the Salvation Army Board, and active in the Red Cross.



In his earlier years, Lewis was a military chaplain during the Spanish-American War and World War I. While serving with the Red Cross in France he befriended Father Duffy. He was a lover of nature and animals, especially his Scottie dog. His interests included camping and fishing and he had a great knowledge of baseball, which he played in college.

Lewis understood and communicated with people from all levels of society. He was impatient with theological debates and the restraint of some rituals that carried men's minds from the worship of God and the respect for humanity. With a spirit of humility, he loved his fellow humans, seeing nothing of race, nationality, or creed. He helped people gain confidence in themselves and his Christian deeds are a continuing inspiration. John Lewis, who died on April 10, 1940, lived his faith.