

# Bishop's Report to Convention 2024

God's grace continues to abound!

During this past year, our diocese has been blessed by the faithfulness of God and by your faithfulness in continuing to engage in the mission of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We aimed to foster delight, in keeping with the theme of our Diocesan Convention, *Nurturing Joy*. I am deeply grateful for a dedicated staff and for the willingness and ability of so many to give of their time, talent, and energy for the purposes of our joint ministry as a diocese. While there is much more progress to achieve, it is my great hope that we are collectively, and modestly (with emphasis on modestly), beginning to reflect the principles of our new mission statement: *Grounded in Christ, Growing Anew!*

During our 2023 Annual Diocesan Convention I asserted how my vision for the diocese would focus on cultivating growth. I broadly outlined three areas entailed in that vision, and I advanced several activities and initiatives we would seek to achieve in 2024. These activities and initiatives fit in the following three broad areas and are categorized under these headings: *Fellowship, Communication, and Growth*. In this report, I will address each category in terms of the activities and initiatives I had proposed, along with their brief descriptions and a pertinent summary. Even though I will list all of the activities and initiatives as well as the extent to which we were able to accomplish them, I want to highlight in particular the work of the Curacy Program Working Group and that of the New Episcopal Communities Task Force.

The Curacy Program has successfully taken shape thanks to the diligence and quick action of the Rev. Noah Evans and the Rev. Canon Cathy Brall as well as that of the Rev. Dr. Luke Zerra, the Rev. Cameron Soulis, the Rev. Canon Natalie Hall, and the Rev. Annis Rogers. This group worked assiduously to create this program from the ground up. Elaine Zevkovich and the Rev. Canon Kim Karashin supported this effort. As a result, our diocese and the church at large are enriched because our newly ordained deacons Guy Brown, Deanna Briody, Jack Brownfield, and Theodore Somes are now deeply engaged in the curacy program in view of deepening their formation. The Rev. Canon Cathy Brall and the Rev. Jonathon Jensen co-coordinate the monthly group study sessions, which are part of the program. Please join me in thanking each one and all of the members of the Curacy Program Working Group for their dedication and for achieving such a phenomenal feat.

In regards to the New Episcopal Communities Task Force, this group was formed shortly after our Diocesan Convention took place last November. Katie Ong, who is a member of St. Francis, Somerset, and who is also an experienced professional project management consultant agreed to serve as Chair in a volunteer capacity. The other committee members are: Jane Burger (Trinity Cathedral), the Rev. William "Biff" Carpenter, the Rev. Laura DiPanfilo (St. Paul's, Mt. Lebanon), the Rev. Jonathon Jensen (Calvary), Eric Linn (St. Paul's, Mt. Lebanon), the Rev. Marty Wright (Advent, Jeannette), and Elaine Zevkovich (diocesan staff). From the get go, the Task Force met regularly and steadily worked on finding an appropriate path for our diocese to

move forward with the goal of establishing new Episcopal communities within the bounds of our diocese. The task force will provide me with a report and recommendations before we meet again for Diocesan Convention this year. I will highlight the recommendations proposed by this group during my Convention Address. Please join me in expressing our deep gratitude to the members of the NEC Task Force.

As you can see from all of the many reports that have been submitted, the life of our diocese is enriched by the collective work of many and all of you. I also want to highlight the extensive and excellent work of the Rev. Canon Kim Karashin and Dr. Tim Austin on the safe church policy for our diocese. They have literally given countless hours to this work and they have labored during many months to achieve this goal. Please express our deepest gratitude to them both.

Lastly, I want to highlight the accomplishment of the Mutual Ministry team, led by Florence Atwood in her capacity as president of the Standing Committee, who conducted a Mutual Ministry Review for our diocese on September 28. I am grateful for the willingness on the part of the twelve persons who participated in the process and for the honest conversation that took place. Florence Atwood will present a report on behalf of the group at this year's Diocesan Convention.

And now, here are the activities and initiatives I had proposed at our 2023 Diocesan Convention, along with their brief descriptions and a pertinent summary:

## FELLOWSHIP

In regards to Fellowship, I proposed the following initiatives:

- *A Governing Body Leaders' Retreat* – this annual gathering of the members of the Board of Trustees, Diocesan Council, and Standing Committee will continue to take place.
  - **This retreat took place on January 20, 2024 with most of the members of the committees present. Our time together included prayer, orientation of the respective areas of responsibilities for the Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, and Board of Trustees. We also discussed the three areas of our diocesan priorities.**
- *An Epiphany Staff Retreat* – Our diocesan team will gather early in the New Year to spend a day in spiritual reflection, prayer, and fellowship.
  - **Our staff retreat, led by Dr. Mark Guy, a spiritual director and member of Trinity Cathedral, took place on Wednesday, January 18. This time apart afforded us the occasion to enjoy communal prayer, fellowship, and reflection.**
- *A Diocesan Day of Ministry Celebration* – This is a new event consisting of a diocesan-wide gathering to worship and fellowship and celebrate our ministry. Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 18!

- **This day of ministry celebration took place at Trinity Cathedral, with Bishop DeDe Duncan Probe as our keynote speaker – 65 people attended.**
- *Nurturing our Faith* – will consist of offering THREE Zoom gatherings between February and June to spend time in fellowship, prayer, and spiritual reflection through story sharing.
  - **February 8th – 12 registered, 9 attended**
  - **April 18th – 8 registered, 4 attended**
  - **May 30th – 3 registered, 1 attended**
- *Thursday Breakfast with the Bishop* – will consist of periodic small group clergy breakfast gatherings with the bishop.
  - **We had 8 of these breakfasts at various places throughout the diocese – 38 clergy participated.**
- *Holy Hikes* – will consist of intentional prayer-filled hikes, with elicited assistance from our parishes, will be open to all and especially to youth and young adults.
  - **This initiative was put in place thanks to Katie Ong, member of St. Francis Somerset, and the Rev. Marjorie Bevans, Rector of St. Michael’s of the Valley who wrote: “We’ve had 4 hikes, one each month since May. Attendance was 10, 11, 3 (rain), and 11. We’ve mostly been hiking in the Laurel Ridge-Somerset area because it’s close to St. Michael’s and St. Francis. ... The age of hikers has ranged from young children to people in their late 70’s! We’ve also been joined by a few doggies.”**
  - **In addition, on Saturday, 9/21/24, a group hiked at the Flight 93 memorial in Somerset with 10 in attendance! And another hiked was planned for October 19.**
- *Summertime Fun* – This new fellowship summer event will be organized for clergy families.
  - **During the afternoon of August 11, a small group of our clergy and their families participated in a fun activity organized by the Clergy Association (thank you to the Rev. Erin Morey). Such time of fellowship consisted of lawn bowling at the Frick Park Lawn Bowling Club.**
- *An Afternoon Tea for Two* - is a new event for Clergy Plus One and will be held on Sunday afternoon, June 9 at Christ Church, North Hills.
  - **Thanks to the Rev. Canon Jim Shoucair and to Jill Anguish, a chef and long-time parishioner at Christ Church, North Hills, and several volunteers from the congregation, a small group of clergy and spouses (14 persons or so)**

**partook of an array of delicious food and drink offered at a first-rate Tea event complete with sandwiches, scones, jam, and clotted cream.**

- *A Beloved Community Retreat* – will consists of a half day retreat for reflection on the meaning of joy through the lens of beloved community.
  - **This retreat did not take place.**
- *An Annual Deacons' Half-Day Retreat* – will consist of gathering with the bishop.
  - **This gathering became a part of our Clergy Conference held September 24-26.**

## COMMUNICATION

In the area of communication, I proposed five initiatives to help us improve the way we define ourselves as a diocese and to enrich our common life by sharing our stories emerging out of the breadth of our parishes.

These five initiatives entailed:

- Adopt the following vision statement with a complementing logo:
  - *“Grounded in Christ, Growing Anew!”*
  - **Andy Muhl is designing a new logo to reflect our vision statement.**
- Share on our communication platforms key theological thoughts from our Episcopal Tradition.
  - **This initiative has not yet begun.**
- Create a new website to more effectively connect with online visitors and be more updated.
  - **A Request for Proposal (RFP) has been sent out.**
  - **An extension of the original deadline for the return of proposals has been granted to the potential vendors.**
  - **The new Website should be in place next year.**
- Strive to share on our multiple communication platforms good news from our parishes and missions throughout the diocese.

- **This goal is closely tied to the formation and expansion of a communication team.**
- Finally, we will continue to offer assistance to our parishes with their communications needs.
  - **Andy has helped amplify 90% of the messages from our various parishes.**
  - **He has also given technical help to a dozen or more parishes.**

## GROWTH

It's important to stress, once again, how growth remains at the heart of our collective wish list, and here what I had proposed:

- Create and offer two formation and leadership skill development programs:
  - *One, A Lay Leadership Program* – to raise up additional lay worship leaders and lay preachers in partnership with the Stevenson School for Ministry.
    - **Three lay parishioners from different parishes participated in this program, with two continuing to participate, and one person having completed the program and is ready to engage in leading worship.**
  - *Two, A New Curacy Program* – to support the growth and development of new clergy.
    - **This program began on June 1, 2024, and the work of the Curacy Program Working Group is highlighted at the beginning of this report.**
- Second, we will seek to discover the potential for establishing New Episcopal Communities and look for new ways to improve support to our existing parishes.
  - A) A new Episcopal Community is in the works for 2024:
    - *The Abbey of St. Nicholas* – is an initiative seeking to establish a new Episcopal Community in collaboration with Church of the Advent, Brookline. This exploration began many months ago, and the plans for the *Abbey* will continue to be developed with the goal of formally launching

the *Abbey* in mid to late 2024 – the Rev. William (Biff) Carpenter will serve as Abbot and he will also serve as the Priest-in-Charge at Church of the Advent. I invite you to read upcoming articles about this project in our newsletter. I also invite you to an open house and blessing on Wednesday, December 6.

- **For a number of reasons, including, a significant life change decisions on the part of the Rev. Carpenter, the *Abbey of St. Nicholas* is no longer an active initiative.**
  - **A new plan of ministry development at the same site was in the works with St. Paul’s, Mt. Lebanon, but this initiative has been discontinued.**
  - **What’s next? We are engaged in exploring a new possibility.**
- *B) A New Committee will be formed to explore further potential for establishing New Episcopal Communities* – This committee will begin its work in early 2024.
    - **The work of the NEC Task Force is highlighted at the beginning of this report.**
  - *C) We Will Explore New Ways to Best Support Parishes* – by identifying categories of needs and the most appropriate type of support and resources.
    - **In addition to already existing means of support of our parishes, our diocesan office works with various parishes to determine their needs and create a plan of additional support with the goal of helping these parishes flourish in the near future.**

In addition to these three diocesan priorities and initiative, I now list below the data for my Episcopal Acts from November 2023 to the end of September 2024.

### **EPISCOPAL ACTS**

- Baptisms: 9
- Confirmations: 28
- Receptions: 30
- Reaffirmation: 1

- Acolyte Acknowledgements: 6
- Licensed Ministries: 33

It has been a full year. I am grateful for our joint ministry and I give thanks and praise to God who gives us the gifts necessary to move forward.

Faithfully,

+*Ketlen*