

# **A REPORT TO THE DIOCESE OF EASTON CONVENTION FROM THE STEERING COMMITTEE FOR HEALING AND RECONCILIATION**

**FEBRUARY 27, 2026**

In the summer of 2025, the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Easton created a Steering Committee for Healing and Reconciliation. The Rt. Rev. Mary Gray-Reeves was invited to work with the Steering Committee as the diocese sought to engage its systemic and relational conflict. The work of the Steering Committee regularly intersects with the Standing Committee and the Discernment Committee. The members of the Steering Committee for Healing and Reconciliation are:

Chrissy Aull

Eugenie Drayton

The Rev. Greg Harbaugh

Diana Kunkel, PhD

The Rev. Susan Leight

James Martinez

The Rev. Charlotte Meyer

Lisa Sabetti

The Rev. Michael Valliant

The Steering Committee meets at least every two weeks for the purpose of creating a strategy and processes for healing and reconciliation in the Diocese of Easton. We have exchanged untold number of emails and created multiple documents to support this work. For our meetings we use the same tools that were built into the agenda and format of the “Gather, Listen, Connect” sessions. These include Lectio Divina (a Bible Study practice), Mutual Invitation and Communication Norms (that encourage respectful listening and speaking). As we did our work, we also enjoyed transforming, spiritual community, and built up the body of Christ among ourselves.

This report offers what we have achieved in recent months: conferences called “Gather, Listen, Connect” that revealed important learning and feedback for the Standing Committee, Discernment Committee, and you, the Convention of the Diocese of Easton.

## **Our Goals for this Convention**

We will share the feedback participants offered at the gatherings about their experience, and what next steps toward reconciliation need to be.

We will invite your feedback in this plenary session and hope to gain a general consensus on the right direction for next steps on the journey of healing and

reconciliation. Please note that the goals and objectives are focused on ongoing processes for healing and reconciliation and conflict prevention practices that will both support strong relationships and infrastructure in the diocese.

This can be summed up spiritually as a strategy for deepening and maturing our awareness and lived experience of the baptismal covenant.

## **Overview of Gather-Listen-Connect Gatherings**

The Steering Committee imagined, designed and delivered three gatherings called Gather, Listen, Connect, in three different regions of the diocese. We used basically the same agenda, content and format for each gathering. Approximately 180 persons attended one or more of these events. Presentations were offered by The Rt. Rev. Mary Gray-Reeves, Conflict Transformation Consultant, and Ms. Rebecca Wilson, Chief of Strategy for The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. Worship, fellowship, table conversations and feedback were pillars of our time together.

There were three table conversations throughout the day that would give participants an opportunity to share insights, experiences and feelings. The questions (which varied slightly at each gathering) were:

- What would you like to experience in diocesan life in the future?
- When sharing an experience of reconciliation, what did you learn from the experience?
- Do you perceive a need for reconciliation in the diocese?
- What do you personally need to participate in the work of reconciliation in the diocese going forward?
- Regarding the presentation around Title IV, in one or two words, what did you learn from receiving this information?
- What do you perceive as a primary need in the diocese?

You can find the verbatim responses on the diocesan website. For purposes of this report and presentation we thought it best not to create a litany of the responses. Instead, we have combined them into a summary of common themes, challenges and aspirations that were expressed regarding participant's experiences in the diocese as well as desired goals and objectives for the future.

## **Summary of Responses**

### **1. What We Learned About Reconciliation**

The participants described reconciliation not as a single event, but as a grueling yet liberating process.

- **The Cost:** It is "hard work" that requires "grit," "patience," and "vulnerability."
- **The Requirements:** It cannot be a solo act; it requires "two-way forgiveness" and "mutual participation."

- **The Spiritual Dimension:** Many cited "Grace," "Trust in the Spirit," and "Metanoia" (transformation) as essential components that are being experienced and will need to continue.
- **The Distinction:** Multiple voices emphasized that **reconciliation does not mean forgetting**; rather, it is about learning from the past to prevent future harm.

## 2. Is There a Need for Reconciliation in the Diocese?

The consensus was a resounding **"Yes,"** with an understanding of the complex nature of the work of reconciliation.

- **Woundedness vs. Conflict:** One response noted, *"We are more wounded than conflicted."* There remains a deep sense of trauma and "palpable pain" from past leadership issues.
- **Title IV Complexity:** There continues to be significant confusion and frustration regarding the Title IV process, its costs, and the perceived "secrecy" that surrounded it.
- **Systemic Dysfunction:** Issues such as "triangulation," "splitting behaviors, (refers to black/white thinking, manipulation, and extreme reactions)" and "fear of retribution" were identified as behaviors that caused harm and need to be addressed through intentional healing and systemic behavioral change.
- **The "Silo" Effect:** Parishes feel disconnected from one another and from diocesan leadership, which leads to rumors, anxiety and a lack of a "shared vision" or sense of community. The comment "You can't describe what you don't know" typifies a common experience in the diocese.

## 3. Primary Needs for the Future

To move forward, the members of the diocese identified several non-negotiable requirements:

- **Radical Transparency:** This was the most frequent request. Participants want "credible information," proactive communication, and an end to the "information hoarding" of the past.
- **Psychological Safety:** A "safe space" where people can speak their minds "without fear" would be essential for healing.
- **Communication Infrastructure:** Many called for a dedicated Communications Officer and better tools to "hear all voices," especially the younger generation.
- **In-Person Connection:** A desire to move beyond Zoom and return to "intentional gatherings". There was a desire for lay gatherings, akin to clerical ones; expressing this as having a "Lay-icus" as there is a "Clericus", in addition to diocesan-wide gatherings.
- **Accountability:** Tools for leadership accountability, such as Mutual Ministry Reviews (typically used to assess the ministry effectiveness of both lay and

clergy leaders in a congregational or diocesan setting) should be standardized, transparent, and spiritually grounded, in order to help the diocese align its values with actual practice.

#### 4. Visions for Diocesan Life

When asked what they hope to experience, the community focused on **Unity** and **Collaboration** expressed in modes such as:

- **Shared Leadership:** A move away from a strictly hierarchical "top-down" approach, toward a "clergy and laity partnership."
- **Resource Sharing:** A diocese that acts as a hub for experts (tech, finance, admin) to help smaller parishes thrive.
- **Equipping leaders:** Ongoing training in healing and conflict resolution so that "conflict becomes our teacher."

**Overall**, participants were enthusiastic about the gatherings. (This encouraged the Steering Committee to plan three gatherings before this Convention, rather than the initial single offering we had anticipated.) They expressed hope for the future of the diocese and openness to participating in more healing and reconciliation processes as well as systemic change in the diocese that would promote healthy relational and structural functioning.

#### Recommendations

Based on the feedback of the Gather, Listen, Connect gatherings, the Steering Committee can recommend to the Standing Committee some **initial goals and objectives** that would positively impact diocesan culture, and heal wounds experienced in the infrastructure of the diocese. These include:

1. Implement policies, protocols or practices for elected or appointed members of diocesan bodies to be properly oriented to and fully informed of the work that they are charged to execute.
2. Create an environment of psychological safety throughout the diocesan system that allows for:
  - Inclusion and a sense of belonging, and personal security in asking questions;
  - Ability to make mistakes as a part of a learning process and give and receive feedback;
  - Safety to make a meaningful contribution and participate without judgment; and
  - Confidence to challenge, suggest changes or dissent without retribution.

3. Support and uphold diocesan leaders in healthy group facilitation norms such as providing clear agendas and necessary materials, encouraging collaboration, maintaining neutrality so all may contribute, active listening and managing tensions or conflict productively.
4. Communicate as much as possible, as often as possible, perhaps establishing a communication committee that would oversee professional standards for information-sharing, transparency, and confidentiality. If possible, hire professional communications support that would prioritize effective information sharing, and encourage community building and gathering through various social media tools.
5. Encourage more in-person engagement regionally and at the diocesan level.

**In conclusion**, members of church bodies typically contribute wholeheartedly, and have a desire to serve. They appreciate serving with a group that together experiences the building up of the body of Christ, and, in so doing, find spiritual nourishment and strengthening of their Christian life. In turn, many systemic problems in organizations improve when these tools are implemented because people participate more fully and their capacity for problem-solving naturally increases as the group strengthens and the culture embraces healthier functioning. A diocese is able to grow and develop into a healthier system over time with faithful persistence in maintaining the boundaries and expectations that the wider body has elected.

The Steering Committee offers gratitude to the Standing Committee and Discernment Committee for inviting us to be part of this season of holy transition. May God continue to bless the Diocese of Easton with grace and wisdom.

Faithfully,

The Steering Committee for Healing and Reconciliation

*Note: AI was of assistance in collating and categorizing the large number of responses from the Gather, Listen, Connect gatherings.*