



Bishop's Annual Diocesan Convention Address

**Episcopal Diocese of Easton
153rd Diocesan Convention - 1st Virtual Format
Reimagine Church: Responding to
God's Mission in a Global Pandemic
(Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:5)**

My beloved Diocesan Family,

In my ecclesiastical vocation as your bishop or overseer, President of Diocesan Convention, chief pastor, teacher, spiritual and pastoral leader, God's shepherd, ecclesiastical authority, servant of the servants of God and colleague in ministry with Jesus our Lord and Savior and with every Episcopalian in this church, I am pleased to welcome you to this the 153rd Annual Diocesan Convention, and the first Virtual Format of Convention of the Diocese of Easton, the Eastern shore of Maryland. On behalf of this grateful convention, I wish to extend sincere gratitude to the members of the 153rd Annual Diocesan Convention Committee and their co-chairs the Reverend Dr. Darcy Williams and the Reverend David Michaud. Diocesan Convention highly commends them for the remarkable work, effort and tireless time invested to develop and create this unprecedented platform for today's gathering.

Each of you is very special to God and to this church because of your unique giftedness. Furthermore, each of us, the lay and clergy members alike of this church, was called and empowered by God for this moment in time: a season unprecedented in our lives and ministry. We recall and give thanks for the faithful leadership of Bishop John Adams, second Bishop of Easton, as he led the diocese through the Spanish Flu Pandemic over 103 years ago.

Ever since the besiegement of the COVID 19 virus across the nation and world, our faith in God has been stretched, renewed, transformed and hopefully, deepened by the reality of this virus that called forth opposing options – either 'lie down and roll over' in a mode of fatalism and defeatism or get up, brush the dust off and take up the cross. I am pleased to announce that this diocesan family chose the latter option. We recalibrated our thinking; duly assessed the situation; devised viable plans: recharged our batteries, adapted new and creative ways; networked and collaborated in an effort to gather the family. Once gathered together, we sought out and developed new and courageous approaches to address old ways with boldness and an evergreen faith and trust in God, who calls us to renewal and transformation. We are people of the cross that means we neither surrender nor give up. We are pioneers of God's new order in the midst of extenuating and seemingly overwhelming

obstacles. Our faith history is one of ‘turning a few loaves and fish’ into enough food to feed the multitude. My beloved, in this time of a global pandemic that is raging across our nation and world, we are gathered in this 153rd Annual Diocesan Convention of the Diocese of Easton in a new way.

Let me begin by acknowledging two truths – (1) we are all experiencing extreme levels of grief in varying degrees and manifestations, and (2) we currently exist in liminal space, that is, a crossing over space, a space of transition, a space where we have left something behind for something new, albeit, we eagerly await as we are unaware as to what shape or form that something may take; it is still a mystery awaiting discovery. The words of Ecclesiastes chapter 3 may provide some perspective, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...” Of note, this text speaks to an interpretation that views life as a series of transitions.

My beloved family, your contributions to living and ministering through this crisis thus far have been nothing short of remarkable and stellar. This sense of resilience and dedication is duly noted and recognized as crucial and vital to the health and well-being of God’s church on the eastern shore of Maryland. It is safe to say that our call to ministry in this time of uncertainty and unpredictability is a call to our very survival as we must adapt to our world as it is, as against how it was or how we want it to be.

Bishop Sean Rowe, Bishop of Northwestern Pennsylvania and Bishop *Pro tempore* for the Diocese of Western New York, recently made a presentation to the clergy of our diocese. In his presentation on Adaptive Leadership, he used the refrain, *normalcy is in the nostalgia*. His challenge to the bishop, clergy and lay leadership of this diocese, is to see the spirit of adaptability as the way forward in a church demanding renewal and reimagination for its future effectiveness as the mission of God. As the people of God, we look to the future with steadfast hope and faith as mirrored in the lyrics of that old song of promise during the Civil Rights Movement:

¹We **shall** overcome,
We **shall** overcome,
We **shall** overcome, some day.
Oh, deep in my heart,
I do believe
We **shall** overcome, some day.
Oh, deep in my heart,
I do believe
We **shall** overcome, some day.

Dr. Melissa Perrin, a licensed clinical psychologist, recently made a two-session presentation to bishops and canons to the ordinary across the Episcopal Church. In those presentations she noted the difference between Resuscitation and Resurrection as we think about our life after COVID-19. She argued that the Church should not long for a return to the ‘Pre-COVID-19 Normal’. Rather, she cautioned that Resuscitation, that is, back to business as usual, must not be the goal of the new and emerging post- COVID-19 church. Instead, she advocated Resurrection as the key identifier and distinguishing feature defining the post-COVID-19 church phenomenon. For Dr. Perrin:

There is a difference between Resuscitation and Resurrection.

- Resuscitation: Attempts to keep failure from happening; attempts to “return to normal;” a desire to push the reset button; attempts to recreate what was or should be.
- Resurrection: Acknowledges that a chapter has closed; an opportunity has passed; Life as it is being lived does not include that which it seemed to have. Life as it is being lived has riches and experiences that cannot be guessed at but must be experienced in order to understand.

I am personally advocating that our diocese follows the movement toward the path of *Resurrection*. In fact, four years ago we commissioned to living resurrection. Life as we knew it prior to the pandemic is over, while a new and exciting life of discoveries and surprises awaits us ahead, we forge forward, upward, onward together.

My beloved, we are People of the Story - God’s meta-narrative of Redemption – *the anamnesis - do this in remembrance of me*. As such, as modelled by our Savior, the church does not ‘enflesh’ any notion of ‘surrender’ or ‘defeatism’. We are the resurrected people of hope in the presence of utter despair and that, my beloved, is one of the irreconcilable scandals of our faith – death is only an entrance into new life and new beginnings. The Book of Revelation chapter 21 verse 5 reminds us, “See, I am making all things new” and in the prophet Isaiah chapter 65 verse 17 God says, “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.”

The Passion of Jesus, that found its pinnacle at the Cross of Calvary and met its conqueror in the Garden of Gethsemane, both ends and begins anew with an empty tomb underlined by the command to Mary Magdalene and the women – “...go tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” (Matthew 28: 10) The rest is now our faith history. My beloved, by God’s grace we anticipate all our churches are going to survive the impact of COVID-19 and emerge better equipped for the mission of God in their local context and mission fields.

The Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Roman Church calls the faithful to this understanding in their Christian faith, “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect*” (12:2). Chapter 12 in Paul’s letter is described by theologians as, ‘life in community’, it articulates the ordering of life that distinguishes a radically unique life in the faith community. The thrust of its evangelistic mission defines the character of its nature and purpose – ‘people are often attracted to faith based on what they see’. This same ever-continuing path is articulated for our diocese in PAROUSIA: God’ Vision for God’s Church on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

By the transformation of the *status quo* the old order is invited into the future realm of God’s manifestation. However, the new order does not dispense with the *status quo* rather, it redeems and transforms it from *traditionalism, where the best way of living is to return to the past or what was before*, into a newer and more fruitful manifestation, where the present takes into account the future unfolding before our very eyes. Granted, there are treasures of learning in the old order that are

helpful and relevant to the future, and those too are required for transformation. Jesus reminds us, “therefore, every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matthew 13:51).

My beloved, we are living in creative and adaptive times for our churches in the Diocese of Easton. While these are indeed painful times, seen in the light of missional opportunities, these are also exciting times as well. Retired Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Rowan Williams, in a recent presentation at the Virtual Anglican Episcopal House of Studies at Duke Divinity School, North Carolina, reminded us participants, “the Church is the context for the Christian life and creation, both culturally and socially; and it all belongs in the context of the God act”. He proceeded to further state that “the Church works in the context of the world, and that church exists because God has spoken and done something”.

The Diocese of Easton in its vision is called by God to be a *Proleptic Witness* of the Church’s articulation of God’s mission. A *Proleptic Church* is defined as one that pulls the future into the present, always moving to the future for the kingdom of God. It is about a future in Jesus; for in Jesus all actions are about drawing the kingdom of God closer to us and all the parables tie into the resurrection motif. The essence of the resurrection church is built around transformation and not reformation, because transformation is synonymous with resurrection. Paul is teaching the early Christian community in Rome about the transformation that happens in resurrection. This present time calls us towards that same path of transformation and resurrection.

SEEDS OF GROWTH. CHANNELS OF HOPE.

My beloved, I now turn my attention to what I would like to term, Seeds of Growth and Channels of Hope. As a diocese we have collectively discerned three fundamental roles:

- Bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus
- Be in service to the servants of God (people we are called to serve)
- Provide pastoral oversight that enhances and strengthens unity in mission

Four years ago, we embarked on a holy pilgrimage with the Holy Spirit to renew, revive, restore and recalibrate the life, vitality and viability of this collective Church ‘God’s little gem’ on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. I refer to this encounter as a holy pilgrimage because in every pilgrimage there is an element of the unknown: uncovered surprises, renewal, transformation, revival, embellished with new and unexpected discoveries in the form of ‘hidden treasures.’ These hidden treasures included the joys of experiencing the grace of God in some unfamiliar places with a new appreciation of where we have been before as well as an appreciation for that which lies in store for us beyond the horizon. (see Psalm 139).

2019 Statistical Report of the Diocese from the Episcopal Church

The 2019 Statistical Report from the Episcopal Church revealed that the Diocese of Easton has shown 0% decline in membership for the year 2019. This is exciting news! It is proof positive that our diocese has begun to shift away from the long and steady decline in membership of previous years and is heading in a new direction of spirit-filled growth. And we are giving hope to a majority of our neighboring and peer dioceses in the Episcopal Church and Province III, that are yet to experience

this shift from decline to this ‘channel of hope’. The Diocese of Easton is one of fourteen (14) dioceses among the 110 dioceses of the Episcopal Church that has shown signs of growth and or stability. This news certainly gives us every reason to be confident to believe in our future. Ideally, we are not where we should be, but certainly have made a shift in the right direction. It will do us enormous good to strive to maintain this level of dedication, commitment, and enthusiasm, knowing in faith that God is with us, and to recommit and devote ourselves to maintaining our focus, intentionality, and energy.

Diocesan Financial Status

Due to the skillful and prudent work of the Diocesan Finance Committee, the fiscal state of the diocese remains financially stable and sustainable. In the early stages of this pandemic, the Office of the Bishop realized the exigencies in addressing anticipated shortfalls in income across the parishes of the diocese. The bishop and Art Kendall developed a preliminary budget in early September that would offer parishes a one-time ten percent (10%) reduction across the board on apportionment. This percentage corresponds with the principle of the biblical tithe. This decision was made possible because of the need to suspend expenditure on targeted line items in the budget. Mission and Ministry line item was the most affected because of the decision to suspend large in-person gatherings until late 2021 or 2022. Additionally, the staff in the Office of the Bishop join the bishop in sending a moral statement by consenting to forgo any increase in compensation including cost of living adjustment or COLA for 2021. At a time when so many of our people are losing their livelihood and jobs, and in witness to the suffering of so many because of the pandemic, we felt it was a small price to pay in comparison. Hopefully, next year will bring the promise of greater financial stability for those so adversely affected and, we sincerely pray the diocese may be able to redress this matter. The Diocesan Finance Committee was asked to design a budget with the aforementioned considerations, and I am pleased to report that members have risen skillfully to the task of producing a balanced budget, supported by the faithfulness of our parishes toward their 2021 apportionment.

Your compassionate and caring diocese, to my knowledge of the 110 dioceses of the Episcopal church, is the only one that has responded in this way to its family of churches. We are doing so while honoring our full apportionment of \$117,000 to the Episcopal Church and full apportionment of \$2,677 to Province III. Mindful of the fact that we are one of the least resourced dioceses in the province and Episcopal Church.

The Board of Managers of the Easton Episcopal Funds should be commended for its work in managing the financial assets of its thirty (30) shareholder parishes of the diocese. The Board of Managers was able to navigate a difficult period with positive results. To date, the fund has approximately 32 million as against 21 million at the end of March 2020. Mr. Al Smith demitted office after over ten years (10) as Vice-Chair. The board recommended to the bishop and Diocesan Council the appointment of Chris Maxwell to be the new Vice-Chair.

Appointment and Transition

In 2020, the diocese witnessed the retirement of Mr. Ernie Cornbrooks, Esq, the Chancellor of the Diocese of Easton. The diocese is indebted to Ernie for over eighteen years of faithful and devoted service. He has provided wisdom and counsel to three bishops, showing calmness in the face of unprecedented challenges and tactfulness in guiding the diocese through its parliamentary procedures. At an appropriate time, post-covid, the diocese plans to honor Ernie in a more tangible

manner. In the meantime, I have, with the approval of Diocesan Council, appointed him Chancellor Emeritus.

We welcome Mr. Regan Smith, Esq; as the new Chancellor of the diocese. Regan transitioned from his earlier office as Church Attorney. We look forward to Regan's leadership in the diocese. At the same time, we welcome a relatively new addition to diocesan leadership. Mr. E. Stewart Barroll, Esq; accepted my invitation and was approved by council to be the diocese's new Church Attorney. Stewart is a faithful member of Shrewsbury Parish, Kennedyville. We welcome both servants of this church to their new positions.

Deacon and Clergy Formation and Ordination

This past fall, I had the privilege of ordaining a diverse group of very talented individuals to the diaconate. These eight (8) new clergy leaders in our diocese were trained locally by dedicated clergypersons, in a two-year long program. These individuals, along with our two outstanding current seminarians, are proof that our diocese discerned well to continue as a free-standing Diocese in the Episcopal Church at the 147th Diocesan Convention, by allowing God a 'second chance' opportunity to transform the Diocese of Easton into a vibrant, and vital partner in God's plan of salvation here on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

On behalf of a grateful diocese, I wish to extend deep appreciation to all of our deacons for offering their lives in service to the church. I also wish to extend immense gratitude to the Reverend Canon Dr. Daniel Dunlap, Dean and Canon Theologian, to the Rev. Loretta Collins, Program Coordinator, and to the entire faculty of the School for Diaconal Formation for a stellar job. Your ministry will have a positive impact on the life and ministry of our diocese for decades.

It is anticipated that through our growing partnership with the IONA Collaborative, Seminary of the Southwest, in Austin, Texas, our diocese will continue to call, form and empower more locally trained lay and ordained servants of this church in the forefront of pastoral ministry and missional frontier ministries. This encouraging development has necessitated the calling for the pastoral ministry of an archdeacon to be responsible for the day-to-day care of the sixteen (16) active and retired deacons of our diocese. To this end, I have invited the Reverend Deacon Loretta Collins to accept my appointment as non-stipendiary Archdeacon of the Diocese of Easton with primary responsibility for the pastoral and spiritual care of our Deacon Community. I wish to reiterate that this isn't an administrative position, rather one of pastoral care and networking.

Congregational Self-Care

I wish to inform convention of an initiative to offer Congregational Self-Care to each congregation of the diocese. Back in the spring of 2020, I invited The Reverend Dr. Ileana Lindstrom (retired ELCA pastor), licensed psychologist with a doctorate in that discipline, to speak with our diocesan clergy leaders about the negative impacts of prolonged stress during the pandemic. Her words of wisdom were well received, and several members of the clergy informed me of how much they appreciated her presentation. In the Fall, I began working with Ileana to plan for a deeper program to offer to the wider diocese. I am pleased to announce that Ileana has agreed to offer a 2-hour session to every Vestry on resilience in a time of pandemic. The cost for this initial session is sponsored by the Diocese. Information about this program was presented to the clergy of the diocese at a recent clericus gathering. While this program is primarily being offered for Vestries, the upper limit for participants

is 20 persons, so I will leave the decision about potentially inviting other members of the congregation to each church. The cost of any further consultation sessions will be borne by the parish. I urge parish leadership to avail this self-care initiative to members in the parish.

Full-time Latino Missioner

The calling of our first Latino Church, La Sagrada Familia de Jesus – The Holy Family of Jesus - in collaboration with Shrewsbury Parish, Kennedyville, is worth celebrating. To this end, I am asking Diocesan Convention to direct the Diocesan Finance Committee to develop a financial vision to ascertain ways the diocese may resource this missional frontier across the diocese, beginning with a two-year compensation package to call our first full-time Latinx Missioner in 2022.

The Diocesan Financial Sustainability Task Force (Parousia IV) is working on a strategy to create the mechanisms whereby the diocese could afford to establish long-term support for diocesan ministries focused on underserved and growing populations. This focus will include the evangelization of our African American sisters and brothers in our parochial jurisdictions.

My beloved, this isn't a *pipe dream*. At present, in La Sagrada Familia de Jesus, we possess an active and vibrant mission that requires support and resourcing. The harvest before us is plentiful and we need to be convicted enough to see and respond to the opportunities this presents. This missional imperative isn't an option, rather it is our mandate from God. This is a critical component in the diocese's pursuit toward missional sustainability, in order to support and grow this demographic of our sisters and brothers within the diocesan family. I ask this Diocesan Convention to sincerely thank our brother The Reverend Canon Bill Chilton for his vision and pioneering efforts years ago. In addition, I ask that the Diocesan Convention thank The Reverend Thomas Sinnott, our Latino Missioner, for expanding this mission, and Shrewsbury Parish, for its committed and ongoing support on behalf of God and this church. And, I humbly request that this Diocesan Convention show its appreciation to Mark Hansen, the lay pastor of St. Clements', Massey for his integration of our Latinx sisters and brothers into the very life and fabric of that congregation.

Constitution and Canons Review Task Force

I am pleased to report to Diocesan Convention that the work on the comprehensive review of the Diocesan Constitution and Canons which began over eighteen months ago has reached a significant milestone. The task force has completed their suggested revisions and turned over the document to the Constitution and Canons Committee for their evaluation and review. This marks the beginning steps in the process of debate and approval leading up to the 2022 and 2023 Diocesan Conventions. To this end, I ask Diocesan Convention to direct the Diocesan Constitution and Canons Committee, in conjunction with the task force, to develop a viable strategy to engage diocesan wide consultation and discussion in 2021. This strategy will need to provide opportunities for reading, reflecting, commenting and discussing the preliminary document around the diocese, which will ultimately contribute to the shaping of the final document. The process developed by the two bodies will be presented to the Diocesan Standing Committee for review before being sent to the Diocesan Council for its review and approval. As reflected in the canons, Diocesan Council is canonically authorized to act on behalf of Diocesan Convention outside of session.

The Constitution and Canons of a diocese is a sacred document that governs the legal organization of every global Anglican/Episcopal Church. And, I take seriously this instrument in our common life. Its

primary function is to order the governance and organizational aspects of the institution. It serves as a servant to the church rather than its master. Likewise, in its drafting it should always see its integrity amplified in its service to a given diocese, as an instrument inspired to, as far as humanly possible, offer grace and mercy. New converts to the faith are not drawn to the church because of its Constitution and Canons, rather they do so because of their attraction to Jesus as Lord and Savior and the gift of 'second chance' that is found in Christ.

Personally, I cannot say enough about the leadership of the chairperson of the task force, Dr. Lynn McLain, who is a faithful member of Emmanuel Church, Chestertown. She currently serves as Professor of Law, Emerita and Dean Joseph Curtis Faculty Fellow with the University of Baltimore School of Law and is a renowned author, scholar and expert on Evidence Law. Lynn's ability to inspire her team led to faithful and challenging discussions that should improve the life of our diocese immensely. She went the 'extra mile' on our behalf and we owe her a huge debt of gratitude.

In Lynn and her team, the diocese is unearthing 'gems hidden in a field' in a crucial area of diocesan life – Constitution and Canons. From all reports Lynn's discipline, professionalism, intellectual humility, attention to details and astute leadership helped to make what could have been an onerous task into a joyful service opportunity. Our diocese has also been blessed with the consulting assistance of one of the Episcopal Church's foremost minds in Canon Law, Mr. David Booth Beers, Esq. David has decades of experience in the area of Canon Law, including more than thirty (30) years as Chancellor to succeeding Presiding Bishops of the Episcopal Church. Also serving on the task force were two former Chancellors of the Diocese, Mr. David Bryan, Esq. and Mr. Ernest Cornbrooks, Esq. These gentlemen brought decades worth of expertise in the subject of Canon Law with them. Our current Chancellor, Mr. Regan Smith, Esq. brought his expertise and wisdom as well. In addition, dedicated lay members of our diocese brought their considerable talents to this project: Ms. Nancy Dick, Mrs. April Reese and Mr. Thomas Shuster. Rounding out this team were some of our diocesan clergy: The Rev. Canon Patrick Collins, The Rev. Patricia Drost-Kuhns, Esq. and The Rev. David Michaud. I ask that this Diocesan Convention thank the entire Constitution and Canons Review Task Force for all their dedication and hard work.

Organizational Life Going Forward

The hope is that with our new model of a One-Day convention format, the diocese would do much of its laborious and research-driven hard work through councils, committees, commissions, boards and task forces, at the front end of each succeeding convention. Of note, this model is vigorously utilized by the Episcopal Church's General Convention and we are patterning our work to reflect that organizational model. Diocesan Convention's task would be to, as much as possible, affirm any designated initiatives having already undergone any required intensive diocesan wide input. This proactive approach should serve to reduce extensive debates on the floor of Convention while allowing input and contribution of a wider cross section of our entire diocesan family. One of the revelations of living in a global pandemic are new, untapped, innovative and cost-effective ways to leverage technology in pursuing the mission and ministry of God's church.

Christian Education & Lifelong Formation Ministry (All Ages)

The Church, as the instrument of servanthood on Earth, is called in every age to continue the God-given task of Christian education and formation from its youngest members to its most venerable. Our diocese is already blessed to have major pieces of this vision in place. With the

Bishop's Institute at St. Paul's Episcopal Center, we have a central site for lay empowerment, education and formation. This ministry, under the talented leadership of Ms. Dee Rinehart, has been pioneering ways to continue their ministry under the challenging restrictions of COVID-19. We are also blessed with the developing partnership with the Iona Collaborative, as previously stated, which will provide us with a high-quality local program for the development of locally trained and formed clergy leadership. This program, under the direction of The Rev. Canon Dr. Dan Dunlap will also be able to provide continuing education opportunities for clergy.

Already on our Bray House staff, we have Mrs. Joanne Fisher, who has been leading diocesan-wide programs for our youth, and consulting with our congregations for years. Today, I'm announcing that Ms. Elizabeth Phillips, deacon aspirant and member of St. Peter's, Salisbury, has agreed to team up with Joanne and accept my appointment as non-stipendiary Diocesan Coordinator of Children and Family Ministry. She will be working with Christian Education leaders across the diocese to develop programs aimed at formation of our children. Elizabeth is a retired banker who also holds a Master of Theological Studies degree from Duke Divinity School in North Carolina. In addition, she also possesses the spirit of a servant leader as well as bringing considerable experience in the area of Children and Family Ministry. She is a gifted servant in God's Church and I'm excited to welcome her to our diocesan leadership team. Her ministry will be supervised by the Commission on Ministry and located within the Bishop's Institute. Of note, this development would mean that within a two-year period, the diocese has engaged nine (9) of the ten (10) component areas of its vision outlined in PAROUSIA.

God is Reconciliation

Over the past year in particular our nation experienced an extremely difficult period in our common life in the area of racial justice, diversity awareness and reconciliation. The diocese will focus extensive energy on the major work of RECONCILIATION through the Diocesan Diversity Awareness Commission's offering of Difference: The Power of Faith in a Conflicted World. We are encouraging our churches to identify individuals within their communities willing to train as hosts. In addition to this foundational course from the Diversity Awareness Commission, Camp Wright is facilitating the Sacred Ground Dialogue for Episcopal Camp & Conference Centers and the Retreat House has been engaged in The Episcopal Church's Becoming Beloved Community work for several years. Each ministry addresses the subject of *reconciliation* through different lenses leading to a common goal – that is – heightening our formation as Christ's beloved community called to be 'reconciled reconcilers' in a world beset by the erroneous and sinful belief that God's diverse creation is an evil manifestation, rather than the very character and nature of God. Scripture reminds us that, "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself..." (II Corinthians 5: 16-21). In effect the other name for Jesus is 'reconciliation'. Christians are ambassadors and conduits of that virtue and I urge parishes to invest in these formation initiatives that lead to personal and congregational transformation.

Scripture reminds us, we all are made in the image and likeness of God (*imago Dei*). Paul couldn't have described it better in his address to the Athenians in Acts 17: 26, "From one ancestor (blood) God made all nations (races) to inherit the whole earth". Archbishop Desmond Tutu, radical description is, "UBUNTU" – I am because you are and you are because I am"

The Post COVID-19 Diocese of Easton

As is patently obvious, the virus has severely impacted all of our in-person ministries. However, our diocesan leaders have been actively planning and projecting toward a post COVID-19 Church. This Diocesan Convention is a major component to that mindset. I would not want anyone to think that our diocesan leaders were not busy and active during the time of this pandemic. Nothing could be further from the truth! We, as a diocesan family, have been conscientiously and deliberately discerning and incarnating new and evolving approaches of being church - always on the frontline of God's mission and ministry.

The (10) Questions for a Viable Vibrant Post COVID 19 Church

With the evidence of efficacious vaccines on the market and anticipation for life returning to a new 'normal', albeit under a somewhat different dispensation, I now pose to the diocese ten (10) questions that I am directing each parish to reflect and ponder for a post COVID 19 church. The post COVID church is likely to be a renewed church and signs of this renewal have been emerging throughout life in the diocese during this pandemic. Again, we welcome the creativity, sensibility, new creation, fortitude and never-die attitude of the diocesan family through this pandemic. Here are the ten (10) questions:

Questions to Reflect Upon

1. What does this pandemic have to say to us about the future of your parish and the other parishes in your Convocation?
2. How is this pandemic shaping and reshaping our relationships with each other?
3. What kind of community do we want to become?
4. What have been crucial and noteworthy learnings about ourselves these past 12 months of physical distancing with limited or no experience of Eucharist?
5. Do we want this pandemic to be over so that we can return to business as usual?
6. Are the compassionate acts such as maintaining regular contact with parishioners, especially our home care family members, just a temporary reality?
7. What do we want more of?
8. How do we maintain the community that we are establishing during this period as/or when we transition back to physical contact with one another?
9. How do we plan to transition? Both in-person and hybrid worship?
10. Do we want something? - Resuscitation or Resurrection (Clergy were given the text of the presentation on the difference between these two description of church)

Parishes are authorized to develop further questions that may be germane to their context. The Rt. Rev. Mark D. W. Edington (Bishop Suffragan of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe) has recently edited and published a book entitled *We Shall Be Changed: Questions for the Post-Pandemic Church*. Contributors are several Episcopal Bishops and their assessment on the post - pandemic church. I have invited Bishop Edington to be guest speaker and conference leader at our clergy conference, May 10-11, 2021. While still working out many of the details, I am anticipating being able to invite the wardens of congregations without clergy leadership as well as lay members of strategic diocesan leadership teams such as the Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, Diversity Awareness Commission and Commission on Ministry to this gathering. My beloved family, our post

COVID diocese will be calling on every leader to be prepared and well informed about the future design of this church going forward. Furthermore, in terms of the 2021 Statistical Report, I am *directing* parishes to log both their in-person and virtual attendance, taking caution to carefully indicate those numbers separately.

Conclusion

Finally, the year 2020 was by all standards unprecedented in its difficulties and challenges, and we anticipate 2021 to be somewhat similar, and 2022 will likewise be faced with the residual effects within Christ's body. Clergy and lay have risen exceptionally well to the occasions that demanded so much with so few resources and learnings; we are writing the script as it is being played out before our very eyes. As expected, we have all made mistakes in the process, but by God's grace and love, by our individual and corporate acts of contrition, and by our Christian fortitude and forgiveness one to the other, this community of faith is gradually recovering from the trauma of loss in varying ways. Each of us must give thanks for the others in our lives, seen and unseen, and for bringing out the very best of humanity in each other.

To emphasize the optimism that I have for our life together, I am pleased to announce to this 153rd Annual Diocesan Convention that I am declaring the years 2021 and 2022, to be "YEARS OF CONGREGATIONAL RESILIENCE." We will intentionally focus on devoting our energies toward congregational sustainability – care of the baptized members and the wider community in God's mission field in each of the villages, towns and cities where we embody ministry

I wish to sincerely thank all councils, committees, boards, commissions, and task forces for giving so much of your precious time, talents, and stewardship of presence to lead this diocese in this difficult season. Of note, Diocesan Council did some exceptional work this past year. I owe a debt of gratitude to the staff at the Office of the Bishop for continuing to faithfully serve our diocesan family all through the heightened uncertainty around the pandemic. Similarly, I humbly extend my sincere heart-felt appreciation to all our clergy and lay leaders who have led their congregations this past year. Your quiet and steady leadership should serve as an inspiration for us all. And I thank my wife Lynn for holding me together in these tough times. She is my source of encouragement, stability and love; a shoulder to cry on at times when the pain of caring for this church becomes weighty. Most of all, I am grateful to my Lord, Savior and brother Jesus, for never giving up on me and forever being a very present help in all times and seasons. I am confident that together we will get through this pandemic and by God's grace emerge a far better people of God.

My beloved in Christ, the inner life of Christ is *a communion of persons*. As such, the existential question I put before you this day is:

HOW SHALL WE FAITHFULLY AND PRAYERFULLY MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER AS ONE DIOCESAN FAMILY?

Let us pray:

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

¹Lift Every Voice and Sing #27