



The Episcopal Diocese of Easton 156th Annual Diocesan Convention

Hosted by Northern Convocation

March 7th, 8th & 9th

Zoom Virtual Platform, Emmanuel Church & Washington College

Theme: Imaginative Leadership & Congregational Vitality in Re-emergence and Resurrection:

*A Mission and Ministry Imperative for the 21st Century Church: Our Resurrection Story
(St. Mark 16: 6-7)*

Bishop's Convention Address

Song - "Spirit of the Living God..."

My beloved in Christ,

We gather in this historical town of Chestertown at two of the most historic landmark locations, Emmanuel Church and Washington College, whose roots run deep in the foundation of this nation. Added to this historic connectivity is the acknowledgement that the Reverend Dr. William Smith, one of the early Rectors of Emmanuel Church was instrumental in the establishment of Washington College in 1782 of which he was appointed its first president. In 1783, he added St. Paul's Church to his cure. Later Dr. Smith was succeeded as President of the college by his successor the Reverend Colin Ferguson, a native of Kent County who was the first rector of St. Paul's Church. Reverend Colin Ferguson was incidentally, also the first priest to be ordained by Bishop Samuel Seabury, the first bishop of the newly established Episcopal Church. Fr. Ferguson was the first priest to be ordained in the United States of America.

My beloved in Christ, we have come together as God's beloved people to this the 156th Annual Diocesan Convention, in this solemn and penitential season of Lent. We do so cognizant of God's love and reassurance of the

magnificent prospect God holds before us as the Episcopal Church on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Our diocese is grateful to have within its ranks, clergy and lay faithful including myself, individuals who have come from different parts of the community of faith to pilgrimage with Jesus in the renaissance and renewal of his beloved Church. We are gathered as a diverse people of faith reflective of the kingdom of God on earth and the Episcopal Church in particular in its current ethos and direction. All are welcome!

We gather for this the 156th Annual Diocesan Convention under the theme: *Imaginative Leadership & Congregational Vitality in Re-emergence and Resurrection: A Mission and Ministry Imperative for the 21st Century Church: Our Resurrection Story: St. Mark 16: 6-7*

There two poignant scripture passages that I would like for convention to keep in mind as I proceed in this address: (i) "...wisdom is vindicated by its deeds" (Matthew 11:19 NRSV) and (ii) where there is no vision the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18 KJV).

As a diocesan family, we have exerted enormous time and energy over the past nine (9) years, 2015 to 2024 on refocusing, reimagining, and reinvigorating the diocese while attending to its maintenance and governance responsibility. Our efforts, you will recall, were interrupted by the unwelcome and uninvited guest named "*The Covid 19 Pandemic*". The nation and global community were held hostage from 2020 to 2022. Even today, the effects continue to inform the way the world, including the Diocese of Easton, does its business.

My beloved, as previously acknowledged, whereas ***maintenance*** is crucial for the governance of the church, ***mission and ministry or service*** is the 'heartbeat of God'; it is undergirded by the ever-living Spirit of God as proclaimed by both the prophet Isaiah and evangelist Luke (Isaiah 61 & Luke 4). It is with this in mind that our theme was established.

Delegates will recall that over the past nine years (9) the diocese covenanted with God's vision on the Ten-Resolutions which gave rise to

PAROUSIA that included the Ten-point components designed toward incarnating the expectations of the ***mind of the church***.

I wish to inform Convention that without a doubt both the Ten-Resolutions and Parousia have fulfilled what they were designed to do, which was to give new impetus, renewed hope, energy, revitalization, and resurrection to a historic story. And of a new narrative being forged within the missional landscape of the Diocese of Easton. Simply put, Parousia has fulfilled its objective, and the outstanding components to be addressed are on track to be addressed by 2026. Next year's Diocesan Convention which is scheduled to be hosted by the Middle Convocation at Christ Church, Stevensville, will focus on Camp Wright.

Let me offer a synopsis of what I am referring to:

- Develop a Diocesan Identity – Prayer Centered Church + Mission-shaped Diocese. Welcome All +Share Jesus' Love+ Serve the World (John 13: 35)
- Established the Fall Mission Summit (since 2021, a day of training, networking, and visioning for all members of our Diocese)
 - The 2023 Mission Summit “Ministry Fair” brought together ideas from across the Diocese and provided a great opportunity for networking among parishes.
 - This Fall the Summit 2024 will focus on Project Resource, a stewardship initiative.
 - Next Fall 2025- the Summit will focus on Congregational Development.
- Support Clergy Formation through Residential Seminary programs with five ordinations over the last several years.
- Provide Clergy Formation through the Deacon School for Ministry and IONA Eastern Shore in collaboration with the Seminary of the Southwest – tuition funded by the Diocesan Budget. The final class for this cohort group of IONA Seminarians is scheduled for Saturday, April 20th with graduation slated for Saturday, June 15th at Christ Church -St. Peter, Easton. The diocese owes a debt of gratitude to the Reverend Canon Dr. Dan Dunlap, Dean and Academic Advisor of the IONA Eastern Shore School for Clergy Formation and his faculty

and the efficiently functioning Commission on Ministry. Due to the number of ordinations the diocese has conducted within the past four years COM has been kept very busy.

- Ordinations for the Diocese: The anticipated total ordinations from 2020 to 2024 is nineteen (19). This includes seven (7) vocational deacons and six (6) priests (Charlotte Meyer's ordination to the Priesthood is scheduled for Sunday, June 16th). And several from our IONA class, which has eight seminarians, all with varying ordination tracks (one of the eight seminarians is currently on the Vocational Deacons track).
- With the graduation of this current IONA cohort group, the program will be given a three-year suspension to allow the faculty, Commission on Ministry and clergy to monitor, evaluate, and assess its impact and new learnings for the diocese.
- Reintroduction of the Annual Clergy Conference
- Encouragement of clergy to pursue their well-earned sabbatical leave supported by subsidies from the Diocese.
- Establish the Bishop's Institute to centralize ministry training and formation at no cost to parishes. Since its establishment in 2019, well over 200 lay leaders were trained through the courses offered, including 12 Listening Hearts training sessions for Discernment Groups, and annual seasonal offerings for Eucharist Ministers, Visitors and Worship Leaders.
- In the ensuing two-years the diocese will vigorously engage in a new program to train and empower lay leadership at the level of Catechist as referenced in Title III Canon 4 Sec 1 (a) of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church.
- The Curriculum has been developed by Dr. Lynn Wiljanen, Director of the Bishop's Institute. Professor Wiljanen was able to draw information from the Episcopal Church, worldwide Anglican Communion and Diocese to develop one of the best catechist training modules that I have seen in the 43 years of doing this work across the global Anglican Communion. The draft curriculum will soon be circulated, and after convention exist on the Diocesan website for reviews, comments, suggestions, and inputs from across the diocese.

The deadline for submission to this process is the Sunday of Pentecost 2024 with the final draft slated for a summer release. Recruitment of interested lay people begins as of this convention. Ideally, interested individuals should already be serving in the role of one or more of the lay ministries of the church as defined by the said Title III Canon 4. The official commencement of training is October 2024. I encourage you to visit the Bishop's Institute table for more information. More will be shared at Clergy Conference and through regular publications from the Institute.

- Beloved, we should never grow weary of developing and nurturing new vocations and advancing and encouraging ongoing vocations among lay and ordained alike. The ministry of formation is the call of all the baptized as an important and vital aspect of intentional discipleship.
- Like most dioceses across the church, financial sustainability remains an ongoing challenge. However, the Diocesan Finance Committee, Diocesan Treasurer and Finance Administrator continue to do an excellent job in managing our finances and keeping us in a stable financial position year after year. Parishes have responded faithfully to their financial obligation and our treasurers and finance committees across the diocese are indeed miracle workers.
- Although Financial Stability remains a major focus, convention will be pleased to learn that we continue to receive excellent reviews from the Diocesan Auditors *PK & S Company*. Their expert opinion for the last five years on the health of the diocese's financial well-being is, "we give the Diocese of Easton an unmodified opinion", which is the best possible outcome for an audit in the accounting field.
- Diocesan Convention shifted to a Convocation/Parish and Virtual Based model implemented in 2020 and has to date saved diocese and parishes close to a quarter million dollars or \$250,000.
- Project Resource: Diocesan Stewardship Training. A group of diocesan personnel Rev. Canon Dr. Dan Dunlap, Rev. Barbara Ann Fisher, Myron Richardson, Charlie Bohn, Joanne Fisher and the bishop attended the College of Bishop's Project Resource Training at Camp Allen, Texas in April 2018. It is anticipated that with invited

consultants providing input from across the wider church, this year's Fall Mission Summit is geared to focus on Stewardship and Financial Sustainability

- The diocese has a reviewed and updated version of its Constitution and Canons. This document was a four (4) year project worked on by some of the best legal minds in the diocese and beyond, clergy, lay and academician in the church guided by one the Episcopal Church's most knowledgeable and astute chancellors, the late David Booths Beers esq., Chancellor to succeeding Presiding Bishops and for whom the project was named in memory of. It was approved by the 155th Diocesan Convention and assented to by the bishop on March 4, 2023. In the meantime, a two-year moratorium is in force to any amendment to the Diocese's Constitution and Canons because it was felt that we needed to spend a few years living into it. It is anticipated some amendments may likely be brought before the 2026 Diocesan Convention for consideration.
- Hispanic/Latino Ministry is gaining noticeable traction across the diocese and the appointment of the Diocesan Latino Missioner has been a significant movement in the right direction.
- Convention wishes to commend parishes that have engaged ministry partnership and outreach in their respective communities. Truly our churches are havens of righteous godly work. We, as a community of faith, are making an impactful difference in the lives of those in need who exist in our neighborhoods.

It is obvious that this brief synopsis should give the entire diocesan family cause to be optimistic about mission and ministry going forward.

- This year will witness the inaugural gathering of the three convocations - meeting in Convocation Synods.
- Looking forward into the next triennium 2024-2027, the diocese will lean heavily into the spirit and work envisioned in Creation Care or Stewardship of Creation. The Diocese of Easton's General Convention Deputation (that help to pass the relevant General Convention Resolution setting out this work) along with St. Alban's Parish, Salisbury and Camp Wright (with their noted investment and

interest in the promotion of Creation Care) will be tasked to spearhead this diocesan wide initiative.

- The myriad of Communication platforms developed over the last decade have become vital instruments in global connectivity and networking in sharing the good news and in the promotion of mission and ministry. We as a diocese must find ways of leaning more robustly into this area of our common life – working together and engaging stakeholders from around the diocesan family, who are passionate about this work.

My beloved, to serve God well, a person must go beyond just trying to do every good thing that others want them to do. Rather they have to do those *good things* that God has called them to do in that time and season. It may take prayer and discernment to figure out which good things to turn down. The Diocese of Easton has been disciplined to function under the **Isaiah Motif** as enunciated in prophet Isaiah in 40:31 “*But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint*”. We have faithfully, frugally and fruitfully endeavored to follow God’s call to accomplish many good things. As a diocese that sees itself as a ‘loaves and fish’ community of faith, we believe that sound governance is founded on the principle, ‘it’s not what you have it’s what you do with what you have’. We have refined the art of how to live from scarcity into abundance, not the other way around; austerity, holy frugality and stewardship accountability are some of the watchwords we pay careful attention to.

Convention, this church God has entrusted to us - the Resurrection Church, the Church of the *Second Coming or Parousia* is one that keeps returning to Galilee where the Son of God introduced the *Gospel of Salvation* to a broken world, a world waiting for the promised Messiah, in the companionship of a humble, unimpressive, motley band of inconspicuous fledgling fallible, scared fishermen. Galilee gives context and reassurance to the church that exists ‘*as a candle in the wind*’ or the ‘church that exists on the edge’.

I now take this opportunity to invite representatives from three of our parishes to present their stories of resurrection:

1. Christ Church Kent Island, Stevensville
2. St. Luke's & St. Andrew's Parish, Church Hill & Sudlersville
3. Christ Church, Cambridge

I would like to thank these three churches for all their hard work and for having the courage to share. These stories are representative of many others that are unfolding in every corner of our Diocese. Each year's convention will hear similar stories. We have much to celebrate, even as we continue to set our sights on "what's next" and where God is calling us to go...

We recognize that we are well into the Season of Lent, a season designed by the church to allow the faithful to enter into the spirit of Jonah – '*the belly of the fish*' for personal and corporate introspection, self-reflection, contrition, forgiveness and fence-mending leading to renewal and transformation. Lent is the Season of Grace which calls forth patience and tolerance to give God time to do God's best work in kingdom building.

The Diocese of Easton has lived faithfully into the spirit of the fifth (5th) Station, '*Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry his cross*'. The work of this diocese is rooted in shared leadership, we are each other's keeper, and the testament of this spiritual, biblical and philosophical vision of Godly leadership is visible for all to see and become involved with. There is an overwhelming number of faithful members across the diocese directly engaged in the work of mission and ministry. We thank God for their dedication and commitment. To this end, I wish to express the gratitude of a grateful diocese to the members of the Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, Board of Managers, Commission on Ministry, St. Paul's Episcopal Center and Bishop's Institute, Diocesan School for Clergy Formation, Camp Wright, members of committees, commissions, parishes and mission centers, clergy and lay, Bray House Staff and many others too numerous to mention.

As your brother in Christ, I owe you an enormous debt of gratitude. By God's grace and mercy, may we continue with God's work of renewal, revival and re-imagination as witnessed in the resurrection story of our beloved Diocese of Easton. Believe, I haven't been more optimistic and hopefully in the future this church before as I am today and I hope you feel the same.

Finally, as noted on Thursday evening's zoom first session of Convention, I plan on completing the final month of my sabbatical with a holy pilgrimage in mid-May to mid-June. My pilgrimage will trace the roots of Anglicanism at Canterbury Cathedral and sacred historical sites in Rome, Center of Western Christianity

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, 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)