

DIOCESAN COUNCIL

What exactly is the mission of Diocesan Council? That was my first question when I was asked to chair a body on which I had never had the privilege of serving. In 2017, Council's president, the Rev. Lou Hays, resigned to move to Canada and shortly thereafter the new president, the Rev. Charlie Hamill, announced he was being called to be a rector in Connecticut and would be unable to serve in 2018. I had just been elected by my district (District 3) to serve on Council, so I was shocked, to say the least, to get a call from Charlie and the nominating committee, asking me to step into the role of president of Diocesan Council. While I have served on Standing Committee, have been a long-time deputy to diocesan convention, district chair, and senior warden and vestry member at my parish (St. Paul's, Mt. Lebanon), this was totally new territory for me.

This past year has been an amazing learning experience, but thanks to some terrific colleagues on Council and the never-ending assistance of the Rev. Jean Chess (Council secretary), Kathi Workman and Judi Rogers, I can report that Diocesan Council has fulfilled its canonical responsibilities while beginning to redefine its own role in this diocese.

Created by Article XI of the Constitution of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, the mission for Diocesan Council is set forth in Section 1 of Canon V. Read it carefully.

The Diocesan Council shall act on behalf of the Convention when the Convention is not in session. In particular, it shall evaluate the policies, programs, and other activities of the Diocese, make recommendations to the Convention, and give general oversight to the work, mission, budget and human resources of the Diocese. The Council shall perform such other functions and tasks as the Convention may assign to it.

The 18-member Diocesan Council is "convention in recess," empowered to do what the convention may do in the months between our annual diocesan gathering. Council is comprised of twelve lay and clergy deputies to diocesan convention elected by the four districts of our diocese and six others by virtue of their positions within the diocese.

The twelve elected members of Council are Kathy Baird (District 4), the Rev. Joseph Baird (District 4), Peter Balfe (District 3), Frances Dannenberg (District 2), Jon Delano (District 3), the Rev. Howard Gillette (District 1), the Rev. Carol Henley (District 2), Kevin Hipolit (District 1), Duwayne Ladd (District 4), Bruce Quayle (District 1), Sheila Stagnitta (District 2), and the Rev. Linda Tardy Wilson (District 3). The six members by virtue of their diocesan positions are Russ Ayres (President of the Standing Committee), Betsy Hetzler (President of the Episcopal Church Women), the Rt. Rev. Dorsey McConnell (Bishop), Andrew Roman (Chancellor), the Rev. Canon James Shoucair (Secretary of Convention), and Jerry Stephenson (President of the Board of Trustees). Together, all 18 of us are your Diocesan Council. The Rev. Joseph Baird is vice president. Council reached beyond its elected and *ex officio* membership to appoint the Rev. Jean Chess as secretary.

A number of other diocesan leaders are also invited to attend our meetings, including the canons, diocesan staff, chairs of diocesan organizations and committees (like the Committee on Constitution and Canons, the Commission on Ministry, Social Justice and Outreach Committee, etc.). This year, I also extended invitations to the chairs and vice-chairs of each of our four districts.

So what did Diocesan Council do this year? Part of our goal this year has been to review and renew the way we do business. Over the years, I believe Council has become a venue for hearing reports and more of a super budget committee, reallocating resources throughout the year after convention adopts a budget. I don't minimize this role. It is absolutely essential because of changing circumstances and personnel

within the diocese. But the focus on dollars has overtaken the equally important need of Council to “evaluate the policies, programs, and other activities of the Diocese, make recommendations to the Convention, and give general oversight to the work, mission, budget and human resources of the Diocese.”

Given its very broad membership, Council is the most representative body in the diocese, so it makes sense that it is charged with evaluation, recommendation, and oversight. In my view, Council has not yet developed the mechanisms to do that effectively. Moreover, as a key church body, we need to spend more time on how to meet our Christian call and Bishop McConnell’s goal of becoming a diocese that “loves, teaches, and heals.” I fear we often get bogged down in multiple reports to the exclusion of what should be our greater mission. I am pleased to report that we on Council have begun to take baby steps to move beyond past practice with more general discussions of broader topics important to this diocese.

Since the last convention, Council has met six times: December 12, 2017, and January 23, March 20, May 1, June 19, and September 18, 2018. At this writing, we have meetings yet scheduled for October 23 and December 4th. Standard business at each of these meetings includes a written and/or oral report from the bishop and the canons, from the presidents of the Standing Committee and the Board of Trustees, from the chancellor, from the president of ECW, from the treasurer (both the treasurer’s report and a property report), from the chair of the budget and assessment working group (BAWG), and then various diocesan committees and organizations like the Growth Fund and the Social Justice and Outreach Committee. Unless expeditiously handled, you can see how there would be no time left at Council meetings for anything else.

This year, after prayer and approval of the minutes, I changed the order of business to begin with a discussion of a particular topic important to Council and the diocese. For example, in January we had a lengthy discussion about the role of Council. It was an excellent conversation, covering a range of issues from mission and ministry to districts and communication, and how we might better serve the diocese. As part of this, Council scheduled a diocesan-wide forum last spring for local Episcopalians to meet with our deputies to General Convention, the once-every-three-years convention of bishops and national church leaders. It was a good session that allowed those attending to express their views on everything from prayer book revision to social justice issues. As a follow-up, I also invited the chair and vice-chair of our General Convention deputation (Michael Braxton and the Rev. Nancy Chalfant-Walker) to lead a discussion at our June meeting about convention.

At our May meeting, we had a discussion about the role of our four diocesan districts with opinions offered from the chairs and vice chairs of each of our districts. Does it make sense to have districts? What do they do between conventions? Are the right parishes in the right districts? The healthy discussion led to the appointment of a Task Force on Districts, chaired by Council member and District 1 chair Bruce Quayle.

One over-arching theme this year has been concerns about the governance structure of our diocese, which in many ways has so many elected bodies and committees that too many priests and lay people are doing double and triple duty, serving on multiple organizations. It is a governance structure designed for a much larger diocese than the 36 parishes we represent. At our September meeting, Council considered the question of how we might think about “right-sizing” our governance structure. Do we need so many elected bodies? How might we make our governance more meaningful and key to the ministry we seek to carry out as a diocese? These are not easy questions.

Coincidentally, the Standing Committee has been thinking along the same lines, and Bishop McConnell (using his discretionary funds) has opted to bring in a consultant (Judy Stark) to help us in this evaluation process. Russ Ayres, president of Standing Committee, debriefed the Council on its vision of this

process: redesigning the structures of governance, getting clarity on the role of the bishop and diocese and staff, and building trust and relationships across the diocese. Council debated this at length with concerns expressed that this process be inclusive and expansive, that full communication with every stakeholder in the diocese is essential, and that the key to success is managing expectations. Ultimately, Council voted unanimously to go forward and a subsequent small group organizing meeting was scheduled for Ms. Stark to meet with the Bishop and two representatives of each of the three principal elected bodies (Council, Standing Committee, and Board of Trustees) to discuss how to get started.

Obviously, Council did much more over the year past year, especially with respect to all the canonically required measures and appointments that come before the body. This includes approving necessary clergy housing resolutions, reallocating dollars in the budget, and awarding a variety of Formation for Mission Grants and Parish Mission Grants and granting relief (at various levels) from diocesan assessment, as recommended by BAWG, expertly chaired by Kathy Baird.

As someone new to Diocesan Council this year (as it was for a number of our members), I admit that this was year of learning for me. We are blessed with some terrific diocesan staff and clergy who eased the process. I want to thank them and all the members of Council and the many others who attend our meetings so faithfully. It has been a privilege to serve as president of Council in 2018, and I look forward to a revitalized and reinvigorated role for Council in the years ahead as part of a growing diocese that seeks to be God's Church here in our corner of Pennsylvania.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon Delano
President, Diocesan Council