

DIOCESAN COUNCIL

What exactly is the mission of Diocesan Council?

As I complete my second year as President of Council, I still remind myself frequently that we are the only governing body in the Diocese that regularly brings together representatives from throughout the Diocese and its other governing boards. And, yet, for the most part, the work of Council is not easily defined or understood.

Most deputies know that the Standing Committee is the Bishop's advisory body on ecclesiastical matters (and often other things brought to them by the Bishop) and that the Board of Trustees has responsibility for properties and investments. But what is the role of Council?

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:

"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 eight lay and four clergy deputies to Diocesan Convention elected by the four districts of our Diocese and six other members by virtue of their positions within the Diocese.

The twelve elected members of Council this year are Kathy Baird (District 4), the Rev. Joseph Baird (District 4), Peter Balfe (District 3), Frances Dannenberg (District 2), Jon Delano (District 3), Kevin Hipolit (District 1), the Rev. Douglas Kinsey (District 3), Duwayne Ladd (District 4), the Rev. Eric McIntosh (District 2), Bruce Quayle (District 1), the Rev. Regis Smolko (District 1), and Sheila Stagnitta (District 2).

The six members by virtue of their diocesan positions are Russ Ayres (President of the Standing Committee), the Rt. Rev. Dorsey McConnell (Bishop), Ann McStay (President of the Episcopal Church Women), 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 and Frances Dannenberg is 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, we continued the practice I started last year of inviting the chairs and vice-chairs of each of our four districts.

So, what did Diocesan Council do this year?

First, we continued the practice begun last year of reviewing and renewing 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, we are still not there yet. But I am pleased to report that we on Council have begun to take steps to move beyond past practice with more general discussions of broader topics important to this diocese.

Since the last convention, Council has met seven times: December 4, 2018, and February 4, March 19, May 14 (met but no quorum), June 18, September 23, and October 21. Our next meeting to elect officers for 2020 will be on December 10. The extensive Minutes of all these meetings, expertly prepared by our Secretary Frances Dannenberg, are available to you upon request.

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.

In 2018, I changed the order of business to begin, after prayer and approval of the minutes, with a discussion of a particular topic important to Council and the Diocese. We continued that this year.

Admittedly, much of our discussion this year focused on Project CREED, including discussions of the three resolutions on new ministries, being good neighbors, and communications. Over a number of meetings, we talked about governance in the Diocese, particularly as the Governance Working Group deliberated various roles of Diocesan Council, including its elimination and/or

merger into other bodies. The final compromise to reconstitute the membership of Council, as prepared by the Committee on Constitution & Canons in amendment form, was approved unanimously by Council at our September 23 meeting.

Again, on governance matters, at our October 21 meeting, Council re-created a Task Force on Diocesan Districts, chaired by council member Bruce Quayle, to examine the "resuscitation" of our Diocesan districts, as recommended by the Governance Working Group. Does it make sense to have districts? What do they do between conventions? Are the right parishes in the right districts? These and other issues will be examined in the months ahead.

Another issue we spent some time discussing was disaster preparedness, both natural and man-made. With the Tree of Life tragedy on everyone's mind, Council approved a Disaster Preparedness Committee and the Bishop's appointment of Peter Balfe and Tim Austin to be co-chairs.

Obviously, Council did much more over the 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, the Budget & Assessment Working Group, expertly chaired by Kathy Baird.

We are blessed with some terrific diocesan staff and clergy who made our meetings so much better. I want to thank them and all the members of Council and the many others who attend our meetings so faithfully. Special thanks to the Rev. Kim Karashin, the Rev. Jay Geisler, the Rev. Natalie Hall, and Kathi Workman who attend all our meetings and facilitate so much of the good work the Diocese does.

At our October 21 meeting, we unanimously voted a resolution of special thanks to Bishop Ken Price who stepped in so ably during Bishop McConnell's sabbatical. It was a treat to welcome this special friend of our Diocese back to Pittsburgh!

It has been a privilege for me to serve as president of Council in 2019, 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