

DIOCESAN COUNCIL
Report to Diocesan Convention 2020
Jon Delano, President

As I complete my third and final year as President of Diocesan Council, I still remind myself 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), Frances Dannenberg (District 2), Connie Davis (District 3), Jon Delano (District 3), the Rev. Douglas Kinsey (District 3), Bruce Quayle (District 1), the Rev. Neil Raman (District 2), Martha Shelby (District 2), the Rev. Regis Smolko (District 1), Adam Sprankle (District 4) and Peter Sweet (District 1).

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 two years ago of inviting the chairs and vice-chairs of each of our four districts.

What did Diocesan Council do this year?

First, we continued the practice begun in 2018 of reviewing and renewing the way we do business. Over the years, I believe Council had 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 reports and dollars had 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 broad membership, Council is the most representative body in the Diocese, so it makes sense that it is charged with evaluation, recommendation, and oversight. Although we are doing better in that regard, in my view, we are still not there yet. Thanks to the submission of written reports in advance, 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 in 2019, Council has met eight times: December 10, 2019, and January 14, February 18, April 21, June 9, July 21, August 11, and September 8, 2020. Our next meeting to elect officers for 2021 will be on December 8. In December, January, and February, we met in person at Calvary Episcopal Church, but all subsequent meetings were held virtually via Zoom. 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.

Among the major action items of Council this past year was considerable discussion on implementation of the Project CREED resolutions, the Beloved Community Initiative (including a special meeting focused solely on race and reconciliation), ministry during Covid19 (including special digital grants to encourage parishes to hold services on-line), arrangements for a "virtual" Diocesan Council, and a plethora of resolutions to implement proposed changes in governance.

Obviously, Council did its canonically required measures and appointments. This includes approving necessary clergy housing resolutions, reallocating dollars in the budget, and awarding a variety of Formation for Mission Grants, Mission Grants, Digital 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, Canon Kathi Workman, the Rev. Jay Geisler, and the Rev. Natalie Hall, who attend all our meetings and facilitate so much of the good work the Diocese does. And a special salute to Andy Muhl who helps this Diocese in so many ways.

It has been a privilege for me to serve as president of Council these last three years. I am excited, if it is the will of the Convention, to witness from the sidelines 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