

## **BISHOP'S ADDRESS TO CONVENTION**

### **November 11, 2023**

Before I begin my Address, I want to offer much gratitude to Dean Aidan Smith and to the staff and members of Trinity Cathedral for hosting our Convention.

It is also appropriate to recognize and offer our deep appreciation to our Convention Planning Team, consisting of Ms. Madison Canales, Mr. Andy Muhl, the Rev. Canon Kim Karashin, the Rev. Julie Smith, the Rev. Canon Jim Shoucair, and the Rev. Canon Bonnie-Marie Yager-Wiggan.

The Planning Team was led, this year, by our very own Treasurer and Director of Administration, Ms. Elaine Zevkovich, who generously offered and gave of her time and superb organizational skills to prepare and have us ready for Convention.

We are also very thankful for the contribution of the volunteers and the Convention Officers who are serving today.

I also want to take a moment to introduce the members of our Diocesan Office Team:

Ms. Shanaz Alam-Denlinger

Mr. Rich Creehan

Ms. Alisa Huston

The Rev. Dan Isadore

The Rev. Canon Kim Karashin

The Rev. Canon Eric McIntosh

Mr. Andy Muhl

Ms. Andrea Rath

Ms. Marlene Rihn

Ms. Elaine Zevkovich

Please join me in applauding each and every member of all our teams for their great contribution to the well-being of our common life.

Dearest People of God, first things must come first. Hence, I begin by joyfully proclaiming THIS TRUTH...

...THIS TRUTH, which gives us HOPE;

THIS TRUTH, which gives MEANING to our lives; ...

THIS TRUTH, which is our RAISON D'ÊTRE. ...

Jesus Christ is alive!

Jesus Christ IS alive!

JESUS CHRIST IS ALIVE...

AND, WE BELONG TO HIM!

THEREFORE, we've gathered to conduct the business of the 158<sup>th</sup> Annual Diocesan Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh in the JOY of THIS TREMENDOUS REALITY.

What's more...You can count on hearing me remind you of this POTENT, PREEMINENT, PRICELESS TRUTH over and over again.

Last year, I reminded you of how you and I were called by God.

I reminded you of how God was calling us to new life!

I reminded you of how we were a people reborn; a people being regenerated, filled with God's Holy Spirit, and called to be PARTNERS WITH JESUS CHRIST...

THIS CALL TO PARTNER WITH JESUS CHRIST is GOD'S FOREVER call on our lives.

Our first objective, THEREFORE, is to develop OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH JESUS and WITH EACH OTHER as fully as possible...

Our second objective is to MAKE THE MOST out of the time that we have in this world and the time we have together on this journey of faith and ministry.

During the summer I spent time reading through a lot of material—material pertaining to much of the work of discernment that you have done in the past.

I also looked at the notes from the two annual half-day retreats of our Governing Body Leaders.

As I read through the material, several words began to stand out.

I compiled these words into a WORD CLOUD, which I want to show you:



AND THESE WORDS are now BEHIND OUR VISION for the diocese.

Hence, God willing and during the time God grants us to walk on this journey together, MY VISION, OUR VISION for our diocese will focus on CULTIVATING GROWTH.

GROWTH is a multi-directional word.

We grow in depth and breadth and height.

We grow in maturity and spirituality and vitality.

We grow in wisdom and number, and strength.

BUT first and foremost, we are called to GROW IN FAITH, HOPE, and LOVE.

Our growth, HOWEVER, depends on the degree of our ROOTEDNESS in God; in Jesus; and in the Holy Spirit.

Our growth also depends on the degree to which we nurture, develop, and use the gifts we have been given.

Growth often brings joy, in spite of the inevitable and aptly named “GROWING PAINS.”

What’s more, growth and joy are likely outcomes of staying spiritually grounded, and of using our gifts in service.

Nurturing Joy is the theme of Convention and our focus for the coming year.

At this point you may be wondering: how will we engage in the work of nurturing joy?

Broadly speaking, we will engage in nurturing joy in these THREE ways:

- One, by increasing occasions for reflection, prayer, and fellowship.
- Two, by defining and communicating who we are as a diocese seeking to live out faith in the Episcopal Tradition.
- Three, by exploring opportunities to grow in various capacities.

In regard to increasing occasions for reflection, prayer and fellowship, we will do so through a mix of existing and newly-organized events.

Here is a preview of the events that we want to organize:

- *A Governing Body Leaders’ Retreat* – this annual gathering of the members of the Board of Trustees, Diocesan Council, and Standing Committee will continue to take place.
- *An Epiphany Staff Retreat* – Our diocesan team will gather early in the New Year to spend a day in spiritual reflection, prayer, and fellowship.

- *A Diocesan Day of Ministry Celebration* – This is a new event consisting of a diocesan-wide gathering to worship and fellowship and celebrate our ministry. Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 18!
- *Nurturing our Faith* – will consist of offering THREE Zoom gatherings between February and June to spend time in fellowship, prayer, and spiritual reflection through story sharing.
- *Thursday Breakfast with the Bishop* – will consist of periodic small group clergy breakfast gatherings with the bishop.
- *Holy Hikes* – will consist of intentional prayer-filled hikes, with elicited assistance from our parishes, will be open to all and especially to youth and young adults.
- *Summertime Fun* – This new fellowship summer event will be organized for clergy families.
- *An Afternoon Tea for Two* - is a new event for Clergy Plus One and will be held on Sunday afternoon, June 9 at Christ Church, North Hills.
- *A Beloved Community Retreat* – will consists of a half day retreat for reflection on the meaning of joy through the lens of beloved community.
- *An Annual Deacons' Half-Day Retreat* – will consist of gathering with the bishop.

In terms of engaging in communicating who we are, you may think it odd to equate communicating identity with nurturing joy.

Yet, isn't one of the joys of life the sharing of our authentic selves with others?

Doesn't deep joy come from expressing who we are in the circles of our relationships?

And so, you may ask, how will we nurture joy by defining and sharing who we are as a diocese?

We will aim to do so by means of these FIVE initiatives:

- First, we will adopt the FOLLOWING VISION STATEMENT with a complementing LOGO:  
*"Grounded in Christ, Growing Anew!"*
  - This VISION STATEMENT reflects our identity and aspirations...

- For it is by being GROUNDED IN CHRIST that you found the strength to persevere against all odds to preserve the life and ministry of our diocese.
  - It is by being GROUNDED IN CHRIST that life took root again and sprung up anew in our diocese.
  - AND, without a doubt, it is by continuing to be GROUNDED IN CHRIST that we will GROW ANEW into a healthier, thriving, and more vibrant diocese.
- Second, we will aim to share on our communication platforms key theological thoughts from our Episcopal Tradition.
  - Third, we will work on creating a NEW WEBSITE to more effectively connect with online visitors and be more updated.
  - Fourth, we will strive to share on our multiple communication platforms good news from our parishes and missions throughout the diocese.
  - Finally, we will continue to offer assistance to our parishes with their communications needs. [PAUSE]

NURTURING JOY is part and parcel of our VISION to remain Grounded in Christ and to Grow Anew.

Finding occasions to grow in various capacities will potentially increase our joy and rootedness in Christ.

How, then, will we increase our potential for joy and growth?

- First, we will do so by offering TWO formation and leadership skill development programs:
  - *One, A Lay Leadership Program* – to raise up additional lay worship leaders and lay preachers in partnership with the Stevenson School for Ministry.
  - *Two, A New Curacy Program* – to support the growth and development of new clergy.

- Second, we will seek to discover the potential for establishing New Episcopal Communities and look for new ways to improve support to our existing parishes.
  - A) A new Episcopal Community is in the works for 2024:
    - *The Abbey of St. Nicholas* – is an initiative seeking to establish a new Episcopal Community in collaboration with Church of the Advent, Brookline. This exploration began many months ago, and the plans for the *Abbey* will continue to be developed with the goal of formally launching the *Abbey* in mid to late 2024 – the Rev. William (Biff) Carpenter will serve as Abbot and he will also serve as the Priest-in-Charge at Church of the Advent. I invite you to read upcoming articles about this project in our newsletter. I also invite you to an open house and blessing on Wednesday, December 6.
  - B) *A New Committee will be formed to explore further potential for establishing New Episcopal Communities* – This committee will begin its work in early 2024.
  - C) *We Will Explore New Ways to Best Support Parishes* – by identifying categories of needs and the most appropriate type of support and resources.

Our VISION for our DIOCESE has already sprouted.

OUR VISION is emerging from the deep roots firmly planted at the foundation of our diocese.

Our VISION will become reality if we adhere to our OBJECTIVES, which are to develop OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH JESUS and WITH EACH OTHER as fully as possible...

AND to MAKE THE MOST out of the time that we have in this world and the time we have together on this journey of faith and ministry.

In this way, AND TOGETHER, we can focus on cultivating growth.

The two years since you elected me, and since I was ordained and consecrated as your bishop have gone by in a flash.

Life is so short!

Time is of the essence!

Faithfulness to God is the true source of joy!

GOOD NEWS ABOUND!

JESUS IS ALIVE and wants to guide us and work with us in genuine partnership.

OURS IS TO DO OUR PART!

It has been, and it continues to be a joy for me to serve as your bishop.

I look forward to our continued journey, working with you to see to the realization of OUR VISION as expressed by our STATEMENT:

    GROUNDED IN CHRIST, GROWING ANEW!

May all WE DO and BECOME be to the GLORY of GOD.