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SPECIAL CONVENTION SET TO REORGANIZE PITTSBURGH DIOCESE IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Ordination at Event a Sign of Health, Hope and Continuing Mission

Pittsburgh – A Special Convention to reorganize a diocese with an increasing numbers remaining in The Episcopal Church is set for this weekend, Friday and Saturday, December 12 and 13, 2008. Beyond business, the event offers a celebration of vitality for The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, culminating with the priestly ordination of the Rev. Kristian Opat.

At least 27 congregations will take part in the convention. That number is substantially higher than the 18 parishes that said they would remain in The Episcopal Church when a majority of diocesan leaders and clergy opted to leave the church in early October 2008.

This higher participation represents 40% of both the number of parishes and total membership -- as measured by the benchmark Average Sunday Attendance -- in the Pittsburgh Diocese prior to October.

“Our numbers will grow higher over the next months, even years,” said the Rev. Dr. James Simons, President of the Standing Committee, the current diocesan leader. “We never set a deadline for anyone to say whether they remain with us or not. All are welcome at anytime”

At the convention’s business session Saturday morning, Simons will present his “State of the Diocese” address. His remarks will include an update on the search for a bishop. The Standing Committee is currently considering available bishops who could minister to local Episcopalians during the search for a permanent bishop, a process that could take two years.

Other convention business concerns electing 23 diocesan-wide representatives to Episcopal boards and commissions, as well as various district officers. Four administrative resolutions will be voted on. A budget for FY2009 will be presented and adopted.

A closing Eucharist Saturday afternoon features the ordination of the Rev. Kristian Opat to the priesthood.

“I could not be happier to be ordained in the Diocese of Pittsburgh of The Episcopal Church,” Opat said. “The recent decisions made by Convention in October deeply sadden and frustrate me. That is why this ordination, at this time, and in this place, is to me a sign of hope as we look forward to a future of unity, collaboration, and mutual joy pressing on together for the sake of the gospel.”

The ordination service will include clergy and participants from every parish. The Rt. Rev. David Colin Jones, the bishop suffragan of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia and “consulting bishop” to the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, will preside. Bishops from other Episcopal dioceses will assist.

The convention opens with a prayer service Friday evening, followed by a reception where deputies can “meet and greet” diocesan leaders and visiting dignitaries.

Friday’s gathering begins at 7:00 p.m. Registration for deputies and observers opens Saturday morning at 8:00 a.m., with Morning Prayer and the business session beginning at 9:00 a.m. The closing Eucharist with Ordination is set for 1:00 p.m.

All events are open to the public and take place at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, 1066 Washington Road (Rt. 19 South), in Mt. Lebanon.

The Convention Agenda

The Special Convention was called to reorganize the diocese and fill a number of leadership positions vacated by those who left The Episcopal Church following the 143rd Annual Convention on October 4, 2008.

Deputies will elect clergy and lay officers to seven diocesan groups: the Standing Committee, the bishop’s primary council of advisors and the ecclesiastical authority in a bishop’s absence; the Board of Trustees, which oversees diocesan property; the Array, an ecclesiastical trial court; the Committee on Canons, which recommends changes to the diocesan constitution and rules; the Cathedral Chapter, the governing body of Trinity Cathedral in downtown Pittsburgh; the Growth Fund, which oversees diocesan investments; and Deputies to General Convention, the governing body of The Episcopal Church.

Additionally, parishes grouped by six geographical districts will elect representatives to the Board of Trustees and a Diocesan Council.

The four resolutions to be approved allow for a waiver of the advance notice timeline for convention business; a consolidation of the number of geographical districts; and, an affirmation of executive decisions made by the Standing Committee since the October convention. The fourth resolution affirms that the Diocese continues to accede to the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church.

Deputies will also be asked to approve a \$764,000 budget for FY2009. One of the largest expenditures, at a total of \$100,000, is targeted for support of new congregations and parishes in financial need. Provisions allow for hiring several staff members, most on a part-time basis.

A Historic Ordination

The Rev. Kristian Opat is the only member of his ordination class to remain in service to The Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh. Among twelve others ordained with him as deacons earlier this year, two serve outside of the region; the others have left the church. Opat's journey toward ordination this weekend proceeded on schedule, despite the changes affecting the diocese in October. His candidacy was approved by the Standing Committee in November, keeping in place the standard six-month interval between ordinations to the diaconate and priesthood.

The Rev. Opat, 28, is a native of Bethel Park, Pennsylvania, where his family still lives. He holds an undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering from Grove City College, and a Masters of Divinity from Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry in Ambridge.

Currently, Opat serves as Curate, or assistant, at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Mt. Lebanon. There, he conducts adult education and is organizing a new ministry geared toward young, post-college aged adults.

"This is a very special event in the life of our diocese and our parish," said the Rev. Lou Hays, Rector of St. Paul's Church. Hays also chairs the diocesan Commission on Ministry, which oversees the ordination process. "Kris's ordination speaks to the vitality and vibrancy of our life together in Christ."

The Ordination Eucharist, as both the closing to the convention and the beginning of a new ministry, will be a diocesan-wide celebration. Clergy, convention deputies, acolytes, vergers, ushers and a procession of banners will represent the diocese's many parishes.

For more information:

Additional information about the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh of The Episcopal Church in the United States is available at www.episcopalpgh.org.

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