

COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTION AND CANONS

The Committee on Constitution and Canons (Michael Braxton, chair; the Rev. Charlie Hamill, secretary; Randy Amis; the Rev. Bruce Robison; the Rev. Michelle Boomgaard; Kenneth Stiles; and Chancellor Andy Roman, *ex officio*) continued a conversation begun in 2013 at the request of Bishop McConnell to discuss the delicate subject of transitional status of parishes within the diocese. The focus of the committee's work was not aimed at finding ways to close down any parishes. Instead, the purpose of this discussion was to help the bishop and diocese look into new or better ways to offer pastoral support to these congregations, or perhaps canonical guidelines that enable the diocese to strengthen the health and stability of these parishes. All the while, the committee was cognizant of the sensitivities regarding trust for many of these congregations, especially in light of our diocese's recent past.

The committee discussed the subject at length, inviting both clergy and laity from the diocese to share their opinions and insights both in personal meetings and emails. At the 2014 Diocesan Convention, the committee presented all deputies with a survey to assess further sentiment on the issue. Finally, the committee met with members of the diocesan Listening Committee for insight concerning the many parishes they had visited, especially those that would be affected by a designation of transitional status.

The committee considered many tools that could be used to offer parishes that may be headed to or already within transitional status the means to develop into healthy, vibrant congregations, participating in the full life of the diocese. These include revisions to the definition of "transitional parish" itself and/or introducing an intermediate category, or a precursor to transitional status, that could be focused on the actions by which a parish could avoid the transitional designation, which to some seemed to have a punitive connotation. The committee looked at issues of transparency regarding the designation, a means of review or appeal of the status, and who would be responsible for making the designation. The committee also discussed from where pastoral and economic resources could be harnessed to assist these parishes, keeping in mind the concerns of smaller parishes that may think the diocese and larger parishes are over-extending their influence over them. The committee also examined the canons of other dioceses that have dealt with this matter and looked for applicable guidelines that could be gleaned from them.

The committee concluded that it should not take any immediate action to revise our diocesan canons on this topic, believing that the means of delivering the pastoral support that these parishes need to avoid or escape transitional status already exist without canonical intervention. The committee hopes the conversation will continue within other bodies of the diocese as to how we, as parishes and as a diocese, together can find new, better and more effective ways to assist each other in the care of souls.

In an unrelated matter, the committee will propose a revision to Canon II (see Preconvention Journal Section C – Action Items), which eliminates a redundancy, thereby making the canon clearer.