



Diocese of Easton
154th Annual Diocesan Pre-Convention
Bishop's Pastoral Letter
Pursuant to Canon III.12.3(b)

The gospel calls every baptized Christian into a personal relationship with Jesus grounded in LOVE. The fundamental unalterable TRUTH is that the church lives by Faith – Jesus is Lord, Jesus is the foundation of the church and salvation comes through faith in God. The essence of Church is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic belief lived out in Jesus, the incarnate word of God for the world, and in Christ all things human and divine have their source and being.

Episcopal practice mandates that bishops are expected to write to their dioceses, from time to time, a Pastoral Letter on matters of faith, order, worship and ministry. As your bishop, I was reluctant to do so for the past five years. Now that we are entering the sixth year of our covenanting together, and the diocese is entering into an exciting period in its history, I have decided that this was the time and season to fulfill that episcopal tradition and practice.

80th General Convention & 15th Lambeth Conference of Bishops

The deferred 80th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, hosted by the Diocese of Maryland, is scheduled to convene at the Baltimore Convention Center from July 4th to July 14th. The Diocese of Easton will be represented by your bishop and elected deputies who have already begun to engage virtually in aspects of convention. The election of a new President and Vice-President of the House of Deputies, to succeed the Reverend Gay Clarke Jennings and Mr. Bryon Rushing respectively, is expected to be one of the headline agenda items. Both elected officers' terms expired at General Convention. The Diocese of Easton keeps this and all the important work of General Convention in our prayers.

Likewise, the rescheduled 15th Lambeth Conference of the worldwide Anglican Communion will convene this summer. Approximately 1500 bishops and spouses, representing 165 countries, are expected to converge at the Campus of the University of Kent, Canterbury, United Kingdom. This conference, normally held every ten years, last convened in the summer of 2008. My wife and I were fortunate to share that experience. The theme of this conference is "God's Church for God's World" and will take place from July 26 to August 8. In preparation, bishops have been engaged in a series of virtual monthly bible studies and conversations on topics of global relevance since April of last year.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has authorized the Letter of I Peter as the biblical text designated for bible study. The recommended commentary is "The First Letter of Peter: A Global Commentary" edited by Jennifer Strawbridge. I would like to offer the inspirations of the Diocese of Easton, based on the study of this scripture and commentary, as a gift to the Anglican Communion. To that end, I encourage each parish to use the designated texts in your own bible study groups, to collect the notes arising from your inspirations, and to send these notes to the office of the bishop to be compiled into a booklet. The office will be communicating with parishes on guidelines for this collaborative work.

A New Narrative

Some of you may recall that when the diocese elected the eleventh bishop on June 11th, 2016, the diocese was at a critical crossroads. In those first years, we covenanted together to give Jesus a chance to use us in the transformation of his church. We renamed ourselves, “God’s Church in Resurrection: A Second Chance Diocese” (John 13:34). Through much hard work and dedication of our laity and clergy, including intentional determination toward faithful ministry, our Diocese has begun to shift its trajectory. Most notable is the pre-pandemic report from 2019 which showed the Diocese with 7,836 baptized members (compare to 7,839 in 2018). In almost all 10 previous years we had an average of 7% decline, and yet in 2019 we had essentially a 0% loss. My beloved, our Diocese has been, and I believe is still experiencing a shift – one that is turning toward positive solutions, enthusiastic participation, resourcefulness, vision, and a robust vibrant sharing of the Good News and hope that is in Christ. Our narrative has turned from one of “what’s missing” to one of “we’ve got this!”. We are called to be ‘the Church Relevant’. We have transitioned to becoming more resilient, reliable, robust and adaptable, ever recreating and renewing established models with a heightened sense of believability that with Jesus in the storm with us “nothing is impossible” (Luke 1: 37).

Even now, after two years underscored by the Pandemic and a new matrix for reporting attendance, I am still confident in this new trajectory. I have witnessed our clergy as outstanding pastoral leaders among the faithful, and their fruitful collaboration with the lay which has done much to elevate the parish’s ministry in the time of a health and safety crisis. Yes, the virus & variants have had adverse effects on regathering, stymying the “usual way” we have done mission and ministry, evangelism, and formation. But livestreaming and virtual platforms have become an integral part of our missionary toolkit and with patience, endurance and faithfulness, this health and safety crisis ‘too shall pass’ and we will enter into a “new wineskin” that celebrates all we have to offer.

I wake up giving thanks to God for everyone of you, my beloved, more particularly, for the delight in serving with so many clergy and lay of ‘goodwill’. We as a people of God are already regathering, recalibrating, reassessing the options and renewing the vision of God. Historically, the people of God have viewed challenges as opportunities for recreation and renewal, “for the gates of hades will not prevail” (Matthew 16: 18). My beloved, the kingdom of God was borne out a crisis – crisis of the cross with an empty tomb as its victor. I am excited about the direction and vision that our diocese has collectively embraced and look forward to pursuing it together in Christ’s service.

154th Annual Diocesan Convention

The 154th Annual Diocesan Convention convenes on Saturday, March 5th. It will be hosted from Bray House using the zoom virtual platform. The Diocesan Convention Committee, tasked with planning the convention has done a remarkable job in pulling all the complex components together. The members of this versatile committee deserve commendation for a stellar job and prayers for the work ahead.

Diocesan Convention sets the agenda for the diocese going forward and addresses the business of the church. This includes electing and consenting to appointments for offices that serve the mission and ministry, reviewing and assenting the budget and financial stewardship of the diocese, receiving the verbal or written reports on ministries and listening to the Bishop’s Address which reveals the prayerful vision of God for the church for the ensuing year and beyond.

One of the major agenda items in 2022 is the resolution to accept the Constitution and Canons revisions that have been several years in the making. The Constitution and Canons is a sacred part of diocesan life.

In 2019, the 151st Annual Convention directed a comprehensive review, and this year marks the culmination of the ensuing three-year process. The last time any such project was done was 62 years ago, in the 1960s. Over ten thousand voluntary human hours were dedicated to the revision and review process, and we are extremely grateful for this work. You are encouraged to visit the Diocesan website for a full understanding of the scope and sequence of these amazing efforts.

As your bishop and chief pastor, I highly endorse this review and strongly encourage clergy and lay delegates to vote unanimously for its affirmation. Good people all around have done good work for the love of God to the benefit of this diocese. Beloved, let us take full advantage of this historic opportunity in the life of our church.

Finally, I once again reaffirm Lynn's and my love and devotion to God and to you, my beloved sisters and brothers of the Diocese of Easton.

Together in Christ's service,

Bishop San