

## **BISHOP'S REPORT TO CONVENTION**

**October 2024 – September 2025**

The task of writing a "Bishop's Report" each year affords an opportunity to look at how my time has been spent in service to all of you in our diocese, to the wider church, and to the glory of God.

The ministry of a bishop is both a challenge and a gift, and I am grateful for the privilege of being able to serve in this role. While there is a rhythm of regular meetings that fill my days, there is also the opportunity to shape the witness of our diocese through special programs and advocacy efforts, and to work with our parishes for their strengthening and vitality.

This year, of course, the continuing efforts towards reunification have taken a great deal of time and I am excited that as of January 1, 2026, we will be reunited with our sibling diocese The Diocese of Bethlehem and forge, together, a new entity: The Episcopal Diocese of the Susquehanna. This shift comes with a tremendous amount of work as we look towards a hopeful future, and it also comes with no small amount of gratitude on my part for the life of Diocese of Central Pennsylvania and all that it has been through the years.

What follows is a digest of major events that I have engaged in this year since Convention 2024, and a few events that I anticipate will take place but that are, as of this writing, still in process (these are marked with an asterisk.)

In the Way of Love,

+*Audrey*

XI Central Pennsylvania

### **1. REGULAR MEETINGS**

I have participated regularly in the following meetings throughout the course of the year in our diocese:

Clergy council meetings (6X per year), Deacon's meetings (monthly on zoom), Retired clergy (10X per year on zoom)

Council of Trustees meetings (quarterly)

Finance Committee (quarterly)

Commission on Ministry (monthly),

Standing Committee (monthly)

Convocation meetings (2X per year in each of the 7 convocations)

These meetings are essential for the effective administration of the diocese. The Council of Trustees oversees the programmatic life of the diocese and directs the work of the diocese between conventions. The Finance Committee offers counsel on the budget, grants and loans to parishes. The Commission on Ministry is charged with overseeing the lay licensing and ordination processes, and the Standing Committee serves as a body in dialogue with the bishop and approves ordinations and parish encumbrances and alienations.

The clergy council meetings are important face-to-face meetings of the bishop with regional groups of the clergy to hear about their life and ministry, to share prayers and fellowship. The Deacons share stories of their life and ministry and prayer updates on a monthly zoom meeting. Deacons have an important and special relationship with the bishop and so these meetings are important for me to attend. Our two chaplains to the retired clergy also host a monthly zoom meeting for our “pensioned clergy” which I attend as often as possible.

## **2. LITURGICAL EVENTS**

In the Episcopal Church we have a saying, “*lex orandi, lex credendi*” or “how we pray informs what we believe.” The word “liturgy” means “the work of the people” and it is in our liturgical and sacramental acts that we come together and experience Christ in our midst. I often say that Sunday is my favorite day of the week, and it is true that worshipping together with our congregations brings me great joy and secures our identity as members of Christ’s body.

One of the privileges and responsibilities of the bishop’s office in our tradition is to perform ordinations, confirmations, receptions and reaffirmations. When we engage these liturgical acts we connect the candidates to the great apostolic tradition, reaching all the way back to the days of the early church.

### **Ordinations and Reception**

This year (October 2024-October 2025) I ordained five individuals to Holy Orders and received one pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America into the fellowship of the presbyterate in The Episcopal Church:

Ford Brooks- (Vocational) Diaconate (serving at Trinity, Chambersburg)

Joe Pritchett and Ivan Ruiz-Swartz to the Transitional Diaconate (Joe is serving at St. John’s, Lancaster and Ivan at St. John’s, Western Run, Diocese of MD)

Kathy Hettinga and Ryan Tobin- ordained to the Priesthood. (Kathy is working as a non-parochial priest in Hospice care and Ryan is the Rector of Church of the Nativity, Newport and St. Stephen’s, Thompsontown.)

Ginger Bennett was received from the ELCA tradition to the priesthood. (Ginger is serving as Priest Associate at St. Andrew’s, Shippensburg and serves as a chaplain in the Air Force reserves.)

Other liturgical events this year have included Sunday Visitations in our parishes where a great number of Confirmations, Receptions and Reaffirmations have taken place (see the “Bishop’s Official Acts” for details) and several visitations in the Diocese of Bethlehem as Bishop Nichols and I have swapped some of our Sunday visits to get to know our new diocesan partners.

It is customary for the bishop to celebrate Christmas Eve and Easter Day in the “see city” at the Cathedral of St. Stephen’s. This year’s celebrations were wonderful.

St Andrew’s York celebrated their 70th Anniversary in their current church building in December of 2024 and I was pleased to serve as Celebrant for this occasion.

In recent years the clergy have had their “Chrism Mass” in the week before Holy Week. This service includes the Holy Eucharist, the Renewal of Vows and the bishop’s blessing of the oil of Chrism. This year’s service was held at St. Andrew’s, Lewisburg.

I spent Holy Week around the diocese beginning on Monday night with the (online) Deacon's prayer vigil, assisting at St. Paul's, Bloomsburg on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and, in the early hours of Easter, at the St Andrew's, York Great Vigil beginning at 5 AM!

In collaboration with our ELCA partners, Harrisburg area Episcopal clergy joined together on the steps of the capitol to offer "Ashes to Go" on Ash Wednesday. The diocesan staff and I also attended the Ash Wednesday liturgy at the cathedral at noon.

When a church closes, a service of Secularization or Deconsecration is held to release the building from the bishop's jurisdiction and to offer closure for the congregation of its ministry in that place. This year we held a service of Secularization at Our Saviour, Montoursville on May 1, 2025, with many parishioners and area clergy in attendance.

\*St Stephen's Episcopal School chapel service. (September) At their invitation, I will address the student body at SSES in September at one of their regular chapel services.

### **3. SPECIAL PROGRAMS in 2025**

It is our reunification effort that has taken a great deal of my attention this year as Bishop Nichols (Diocese of Bethlehem) and I have met monthly with the Transitional Leadership Committee (TLC) and our consultant, The Rev. Jen Adams (Diocese of the Great Lakes.). The TLC has overseen eleven different Working Groups that are "building our new diocese." The bishops have been asked to consult and participate in every area of the work including the development of a new shield and "brand" for the diocese, the re-working of the Deacon's Customary and the Clergy Manual, the process for ordination and lay licensing, the composition of our staff and location of our offices, the composition of our Disciplinary Board, various legal aspects of the merger and the creation of a new budget and set of Constitution and Canons. I am overwhelmed by the skill, dedication and cooperation of the members of our Working Groups, and I know that our new diocese will be starting on solid footing, thanks to their efforts.

Among the special programs that the diocese sponsored this year were a "Vestry Vitality Day" featuring the Rev. Jay Sidebotham held at All Saints Hershey, a rally day for the "Saving Lives: ending Gun Violence and the "With One Voice" interfaith coalition at the Capitol, an Absalom Jones Evensong and workshop featuring Dr. Catherine Meeks, and an online workshop on Immigration and the activity of ICE in our diocese.

Additionally, I participated as a guest in an online Youth Bible Study for our diocesan young folks, three Pride Events (Wellsboro, Harrisburg and \*Altoona), and a reception at the State Library at the invitation of the Governor featuring the "Souls Shot" exhibit.

I facilitated an Easter week retreat titled "The Green Blade Riseth" for women at the Brookland Retreat Center and, beginning in June, the "Souls Together" online gathering launched, creating a monthly space for dialogue and prayer on issues in our church and our world.

As this report is being written, I am looking forward to participating in a \*Sibling Parish weekend in Gettysburg (September), the \*Love Gala (September), and the \*Dismantling Racism Commission's pilgrimage to the Carlisle Indian School (November).

### **4. STAFF CHANGES**

In 2024-5 we experienced several shifts in diocesan staff:

Resignations were accepted from Alexis Guzick (Communications), The Rev. Kevin Barron (Shaped by Faith and Transition Ministry,) Sarah Stonesifer Boylan (Dean, SSFM), Barbara Hoffman (Finance Assistant) and Debbie Robelen (Archives, Reception and Office Assistant).

The Rev. Luke Zerra was appointed as Interim Dean of the Stevenson School. The Rev. Kevin Lowe was hired as Associate Dean. The Rev. Carenda Baker was hired to serve as Interim Transition Officer in the southern part of the diocese, and Erin Monaghan Kamran was hired as the Canon for Communications. Robin Rinaldi was hired as Interim Communications Director to cover for Erin's parental leave. Celal Kamran (Multi Cultural Missioner) joined Erin on parental leave, and Chad Linder (Canon for Finance and Operations) took a short sabbatical.

## **5. COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH**

Part of the call to serve as bishop includes participating in the life and ministry of the wider church. In 2024-5 I participated in a special focus group to help shape the vision of our new Presiding Bishop and The Episcopal Church, in two week-long meetings of the House of Bishops ( I was invited as a featured speaker at the Fall 2025 meeting), and the Province III leadership invited me to give a presentation at the spring Synod in West Virginia. Additionally, I helped the Diocese of Northwest Pennsylvania who have been without a bishop by leading a Regional Confirmation service in Erie on Ascension Day. I have participated in monthly Province III Bishops' calls, serve as a 3-year coach to a new bishop in The Episcopal Church (West Missouri), and I am the "Bishop Visitor" for the Order of the Divine Mercy in Montreal, Canada.

## **6. PERSONAL and PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

In this past year I have continued with my commitment to my "cell" or "colleague" group (a small group of 4 other bishops that meets monthly on zoom and twice a year for a 3-day retreats), and Bishop Nichols (Diocese of Bethlehem) and I went to a week-long continuing education seminar for judicatory heads focused on organization development through a psychotherapeutic lens. It was held at a conference center in Western Massachusetts and led by Frances Unsell and Gerry Fromme of The Development Center and the Austen Riggs Center.

I had my first major surgery on November 1st to re-arrange the bones in my right foot (adductoplasty) and was recovered enough by July to be able to spend four days on a solo backpacking trip on the Appalachian Trail (the rocky northeastern Pennsylvania section!)

Thank you for the privilege of serving our diocese.

+ACS