

CONVOCATION ASSEMBLY MEETING

Brief historical background

November 2013

Our Diocese consists of the twenty-three counties which make up Central Pennsylvania. Spread over this large geographical area are 66 congregations, mostly rural, many in isolated towns. For our Diocese, developing and maintaining a sense of community that overcomes significant geographical distances has always been and remains a challenge. Earlier in our corporate life, the Diocese was divided into four archdeaconries. This earlier model enabled some sense of being part of the larger community. In other cases, this geographical arrangement did not seem to diminish the felt distance between the congregations in any meaningful way.

Over thirty years ago a new model was introduced expanding the number of subdivisions from four to seven. Calling these regional divisions "Convocations," diocesan canons named the geographical areas but left it to the Diocesan Council of Trustees to designate which congregations would be included within each Convocation. Other than acknowledging a need for effective coordination of the work of the Church, the canons purposely said little about the actual role of convocations or how they would function. It was hoped that each convocation would discover a common local mission, develop its own set of by-laws, and pursue programs that were appropriate for its circumstances. Over time, some convocations organized themselves, met and developed various joint ministries. Other convocations did little and met rarely, if at all. The Constitution and Canons Committee in reviewing our canons recommended that our canons be more prescriptive in how convocations should function. Without being overly bureaucratic, the new canons attempt to provide both a framework for the gathering of convocations as well as the purpose for such gatherings.

The Nature of Convocation Assembly Meetings

In the diocesan canons, "Convocation Assemblies" are defined as gatherings of clergy and representative laity.

Who is to attend?

Representation is to include all clergy, canonically resident or serving parishes within the convocation, and three lay delegates from each parish, including at least one lay delegate from each parish who had served as a delegate or alternate at the last diocesan convention. Other parish delegates and alternates to the next diocesan convention are also invited to participate in the assembly without vote in convocation affairs. The nature of parish representation in the canons points out an expectation that delegates to diocesan convention are chosen not only to represent the parish at the time of convention itself, but that delegates also have a responsibility for helping to carry out decisions made by convention. The thought is that as "partners in Christ" we need to have individuals who both formulate decisions (from convention) as well as help implement them in local regions.

Purpose

The purpose of Convocations Assemblies is:

- To plan and work together on local mission efforts,
- To share information and resources within the convocation, and
- To participate in determining and carrying out the diocesan convention mission priorities.

To accomplish this, the canons call for at least two assemblies per calendar year. These required meetings are to take place in the Fall and Spring of each year.

The primary focus of the Fall Assembly is twofold:

- To provide an occasion when convocations will have the opportunity to consider items which have been acted upon at the Diocesan Convention and need to be addressed by convocation.
- To be a time to consider how the convocation is living out the current diocesan ministry theme.

The **Fall Assembly** should include:

- Worship and Bible study
- Consideration of items acted upon at Diocesan Convention which the convocation needs to address
- Consideration of how the convocation is living out the current diocesan mission

The **Spring Assembly** focuses primarily on Diocesan Convention and should include:

- Worship and Bible study
- Presentations and discussion of matters to come before Diocesan Convention

Leadership

The canons spell out the leadership for each Convocation:

- Convenor (who is to be elected from the members of the Fall assembly for a two-year term)
- Assistant Convenor (also called Co-convenor, elected from the members of the Fall assembly for a two-year term and who must be of the opposite order as the Convenor)
- Treasurer and Secretary (both of whom are to be appointed by the Convenor to serve a two-year term).

The canons limit the service of the Convenor and Assistant Convenor to two consecutive two-year terms. A year off from these positions is required before a person may be considered again.

As convocations begin to function more actively than they have in the past, the canons presume that there may well be need for a convocation budget supported by parishes within the convocation, and perhaps from the Diocesan operating budget as well. The canons further stipulate that when such a treasury comes into existence, it is to be subject to an annual audit review like all other entities of the church. This audit is to be submitted to the Bishop's office just as a copy of all parish audits are to be forwarded to the Diocesan office.

Finally, the canons call for Convocations to develop bylaws to govern themselves.

Who calls the assembly

Given the thrust of our canons emphasizing our Diocese being "partners in Christ", the responsibility for calling the assembly and determining who should host such meetings falls upon each Convenor. The Diocesan office should be informed of when and where such meetings are to take place, but it remains for the Convocations themselves to initiate and carry on this ministry.

Clerical Life

Over and above the concern for common mission and ministry, the canons prescribe gatherings of clergy within each convocation. This gathering is called a "clericus." A clericus is to meet at times other than the Convocation Assembly and select its own leadership and schedule. These gatherings are to focus on professional learning, spiritual growth and person/social support for the clergy of a Convocation.