



## **The Report of the Reunification Discernment Committee 2023**

*"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another,  
as good stewards of God's varied grace." (1 Peter 4:10)*

### **Introduction**

In October of 2022, the diocesan conventions of the Dioceses of Central Pennsylvania and Bethlehem agreed to "enter into a period of intentional exploration" with one another to explore our "future reunification as one diocese."

We were called into this discernment because both dioceses (as with most in the Episcopal Church) are facing the hard realities and effects of declining membership. The number of struggling parishes is growing and many are dependent on endowment funds for survival. There is a clergy shortage across the church and societally, people's "relationship with church" has changed. As Episcopalians, we have yet to fully acknowledge our current landscape and respond faithfully to it.

Could a reunification of our dioceses help foster such a response? Could the process of reunification help create a more sustainable and life-giving way forward for the Episcopal Church here? Could we more faithfully steward our church's resources and more effectively equip our congregations for being church now if we were one diocese instead of two? Could we more consistently and creatively form disciples of Jesus, more impactfully tend to the brokenness in this world if we were one?

The diocesan Standing Committees appointed ten members to the Reunification Discernment Committee with equal representation from each diocese to work with Bishops Scanlan and Nichols in this discernment. The Bishops also appointed two chaplains, The Rev. Chris Sutton and The Venerable Jane Miron and brought on an outside consultant, The Rev. Jennifer Adams, to help guide and support the process.

The Reunification Discernment Committee began its work in January 2023. The full Committee met monthly for the past nine months either in person or by zoom with four sub-teams that also met regularly. The first phase of work involved gathering and analyzing data from programmatic and organizational areas of diocesan life; exploring the history of these two dioceses; connecting with other dioceses who are in similar discernment processes; and supporting our bishops as they help us consider "an Episcopate for Our Time." The sub-teams' summaries from this first phase are included below. The full Committee will also offer a presentation at both Diocesan Conventions.

## **Summer Listening Sessions**

Input from clergy, lay members, and staff of both dioceses is essential to this discernment. The Committee needs to hear the questions, concerns, and prayers of our people and will seek those out throughout this process. We're curious about your hopes and what potentials you see.

With the support of diocesan staff, the Committee hosted a series of five Listening Sessions (via zoom) through which about two hundred members of the dioceses engaged in this discernment process. Participants shared their reasons for becoming and staying members of the Episcopal Church. They offered their experiences of what individuals and congregations receive and/or wish they would receive from their dioceses. They expressed their dreams for the Episcopal Church in Pennsylvania and asked questions related to the possibility of reunification.

The Listening Sessions revealed that members of both dioceses place high value on the welcome, inclusion, and sense of community they experience in the Episcopal Church. The Church's liturgy, sacraments, and "the beauty of worship" are integral to their life of faith. Community work, participation in social justice efforts, and room to be "thoughtfully Christian" were repeatedly identified as "reasons why we came to and remain in the Episcopal Church."

Attendees indicated gratitude to their diocese for ongoing support for clergy, the sharing of various resources, appreciation of positive changes made during the current bishops' tenures and their appreciation of their bishop's visitations. People from both dioceses spoke very positively about diocesan formation programs, with Central Pennsylvania holding up the Stevenson School and members of Bethlehem emphasizing the Spring "Gather." When asked about what they hoped to receive more consistently from their diocese, participants expressed a desire for "more communication," resources, and enhanced connection.

The dreams for the Episcopal Church in Pennsylvania expressed by participants included greater visibility and that the Episcopal Church "would stop being the best kept secret." People from both dioceses spoke of a desire for "more racial and ethnic diversity" and enhancing the church's intentional reach to "younger generations." They shared dreams of growth and hope for vibrant congregations that are "more than barely viable." They dream of "a church in the neighborhood." "We need to break down our walls and get out there more!"

The struggle for congregations is real in both dioceses. So is the hope for an Episcopal Church that is alive and well, able to experience and share God's love in ways that are merciful, transformative, and holy.

Questions and concerns expressed by participants in these Listening Sessions included: "How would such a big diocese work?... Would a bishop of a larger diocese remain accessible?... What about our current bishops?... Could we foster relationships well in a larger diocese? Does reunification make financial sense?... Are we really healthy and viable now or not?... Is this already a done deal?"

In these Listening Sessions, clergy expressed more concerns about reunification than lay people. It was true that many who have participated in some form of collaboration between our dioceses seem to feel good about the discernment process and the possibility of reunification.

## **The Discernment Process Extended Timeframe**

Given the magnitude of this work and the time required for prayerful and reasoned discernment not only by the Committee but by members of the dioceses, the Committee and Bishops concur that an extended timeline would be beneficial to this process. The Committee was originally charged with making

recommendations regarding reunification to the diocesan conventions in 2023. The Committee submitted a resolution to both dioceses recommending an extended timeline into 2024 to allow for further study, conversation, design, input, and prayer.

## **Reunification Discernment Committee Sub-Team Reports**

### **History of our Dioceses**

**Committee members: The Rev. Rodney Conn, The Rev. Doug Moyer, and The Rev. John Harwood**

#### **I. History of Pennsylvania and The Episcopal Church**

Pennsylvania's story starts some 480 million years ago with the collision of tectonic plates to form what we call the Appalachian Mountains. Climate changes experienced over the past 30,000 years finished forming the geography and topography of the region. The area encompassing the two Dioceses includes two major tributary systems, the Delaware, and Susquehanna, each emptying into well protected bays. The peoples that initially settled along these rivers were likely hunter-gatherers who arrived some 16 to 19,000 years ago.

Along what is now called the Delaware River, the Lenni Lenape, or "Original People", settled. One member of our Committee is proud to say that their 9<sup>th</sup> great grandmother was known as Anna in her Swedish community, but born Wakusutome, or Bright Lightning in her Lenni Lenape community. The Lenni Lenape people continue to celebrate their heritage today by operating the Museum of Indian Culture in Allentown.

The Susquehannock, or "People of the Longhouse", lived along, as you can guess, the Susquehanna River. Due to disease brought by Europeans, and conflict with the Haudenosaunee peoples (also known as Iroquois), only about 300 Susquehannock were alive in 1700. By 1789, all tribal lands had been ceded to Pennsylvania with many Original Peoples relocating west outside of the original 13 colonies.

The first interactions with Europeans were Dutch and French fur trappers with the first recorded interactions in about 1550. Swedish settlers negotiated with the Lenni Lenape a 67-mile frontage to the Delaware River centered on modern Wilmington, Delaware. In 1681, 45,000 acres of Pennsylvania was granted to William Penn by King Charles II. The next year, William Penn along with about 70 mostly Quaker settlers, arrived in Philadelphia. The land grant included modern day Philadelphia, Chester, Bucks and Delaware Counties.

While an Anglican presence was stipulated for the grant area, the Quaker presence led to further settlements of those called to that faith tradition. The Welsh negotiated for a tract of 40,000 acres to be constituted as a separate county, now part of Montgomery, Chester, and Delaware counties. Towns such as North Wales, Lower Gwynedd, Upper Gwynedd, Lower and Upper Merion, Narberth, Bala Cynwyd, Radnor, Malvern, Berwyn, and Haverford Township have Welsh names. A second 30,000 acre "Welsh Tract" was granted in 1701 that included land in modern Delaware and Maryland.

Scots Irish settlers migrated to the region as servants and free people. They came as both individuals and families, sometimes as political exiles. They arrived in two major waves between 1710 and 1776, and again between 1780 and 1820.

As Penn allowed a diversity of religious expression and encouraged a wide variety of non-English Europeans, the migration of German speaking settlers continued and settled modern Berks, Lancaster,

and Lehigh Counties. By 1775, there were approximately 65,000 to 75,000 ethnically German residents in Pennsylvania.

Shortages of farmland and a growing population in Connecticut led some to look at their original land grant, the Charter of 1662. Charles II issued a grant that described Connecticut's western border as the "Southern Sea" or Pacific Ocean. In 1753, the Susquehanna Company was formed and purchased land from the Iroquois that included Pennsylvania land with settlers moving into the area around 1762.

In 1773, England formally gave permission to Connecticut to settle in Pennsylvania. During the Revolutionary War, the Battle of Wyoming pushed Connecticut settlers out but many returned at the end of the Revolutionary War. This migration continued until Congress intervened and by 1799, Connecticut had dropped all claims to land in the Wyoming Valley.

As early as 1639, Dutch settlers brought enslaved Africans to Pennsylvania. While William Penn and the first English settlers tolerated slavery Quakers and German immigrants spoke out against it. The Great Awakening of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century urged freeing slaves and discouraged the importation of additional slaves. In 1780, Pennsylvania passed the Gradual Abolition Act, the first of its kind in the United States. In 1790, there were 3,737 enslaved people, by 1810 795, in 1840 there remained 64. It wasn't until the 1850 census that slavery had been completely abolished in the State.

Today, the largest increase in population by race and ethnicity in Pennsylvania is the "Hispanic/Latino" group. In 2000, there were 398,374 people in the group which grew to 1,084,634 by 2021 for a 172% increase. In 2020, Hispanic residents in Lehigh and Berks counties were 23-25% of the population. In Pennsylvania and in most of the state's counties, the youth population, or those under 18 years of age, was more diverse than the adult population, (56.4% vs 40.3% diversity index, respectively).

During the geological formation of Pennsylvania, iron was found near the surface in many parts of the state. By 1759 Swedish Lutheran Pastor Israel Acrelius wrote, "Pennsylvania, in regard to its ironworks, is the most advanced of all the American colonies." Readily available anthracite coal led to the establishment of the American steel industry in Pennsylvania.

By the beginning of the American Civil War, Pennsylvania was a hub of manufacturing and agriculture. This trend continued through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Manufacturing hubs moving to other parts of the country and foreign supply has caused a decline in factory jobs.

The first Anglican presence was Christ Church parish in Philadelphia founded in 1695 as a condition of William Penn's Charter. The Episcopal Church was formed in 1785 at the same time as the Diocese of Pennsylvania, encompassing the entire state. The Diocese consisted of 14 parishes in and around Philadelphia.

The first Convention of the Diocese of Pennsylvania was held in Philadelphia on May 23, 1785 and by 1787, William White had been elected Bishop. The first split of dioceses in Pennsylvania was in 1866 with the formation of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. By 1870, the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania was carved out of the Diocese of Pennsylvania. In 1881, talk of a further division or appointment of a Coadjutor or Suffragan started and continued so that by the 1896 Convention, Bishop Rulison directed a study to further divide the Diocese.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bishop Talbot began to push for division citing that during the interview process, he was told that the Diocese was to be split. In 1899, Bishop Talbot reported that he had been present for 31 Eucharists, delivered 277 sermons and addresses, confirmed 1615, consecrated 1 church, Further, there was 1 bishop, 115 priests and 5 deacons canonically resident in a diocese of 106 parishes.

He also stated that much of the Diocese was “fallow” and that a greater number of people could be reached with further expansion of the church.

This division was not accomplished until 1905 with a split between the eastern and western portions of the old Diocese. The “new” Diocese was named the Diocese of Harrisburg, while the “old” Diocese retained the Central Pennsylvania name until 1909 when it adopted the Diocese of Bethlehem name. In 1971, the Diocese of Harrisburg adopted the original name of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania.

The final division of dioceses in Pennsylvania came with the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania separating from the Diocese of Pittsburgh in 1910. All these divisions were driven by a variety of factors. The chief one being the changes in demographics, and the number and size of parishes.

So, to some numbers, in 1904 the two dioceses had 18,918 communicants; in 1925, the year Bishop Talbot retired, that number had grown to 29,898. According to the national church’s records, in 2021 the two dioceses totaled 17,254. Combined, we are now smaller than we were at the split.

Additionally, a 2020 Gallup poll indicated that only 47% of US adults belonged to a church, synagogue, or mosque. This is down by over 20 points since the turn of the century. The peak occurred between 1945 and 1950 at 76%. Of particular interest was the attendance rate of 36% for Millennials, those born between 1981-1996.

## **Learning from Other Dioceses**

**Committee members: The Revs. Rodney Conn, Doug Moyer, and John Harwood**

Ours are not the first dioceses to consider reunification (also known as “juncture” if the dioceses were never previously one.) The dioceses of Duluth and Minnesota reunified in 1944. Chicago and Quincy in 2013, and Texas and Fort Worth in 2022. After two previous iterations of considering reunification, the three dioceses of Wisconsin will vote on moving ahead with reunification at their diocesan conventions this month. Northwest Pennsylvania and Western New York entered into “Episcopal Partnership” and have been sharing a Bishop and a single staff while they collaborate in ministry and discern a path forward. Eastern and Western Michigan have been in discernment since early 2020, had three Joint Conventions, share staff, and are preparing to vote on juncture in spring of 2024. Indianapolis and Northern Indiana have just begun their own discernment process of reunification. In Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire the bishops are diocesan in their home diocese and serve as assisting bishops in the other two while these three dioceses explore current and future possibilities together.

This sub-team has interviewed several key people serving in this range of diocesan experiences and have the benefit of our consultant, the Rev. Jennifer Adams’ insights who has been part of the discussions in Michigan and Indiana.

This sub-team has also started conversations with larger dioceses to give a perspective on the organization and function of leadership there. For reference, the combined area of Bethlehem and Central Pennsylvania is 25,033 square miles with 118 parishes in 2023. We will talk with Arizona (113,990 square miles and 80 parishes,) Colorado (104,094 square miles and 93 parishes,) and Minnesota with 86,936 square miles and 111 parishes.

## **Stewardship of Resources: Organization, Structure & Finance**

**Committee Members: Mr. Michael McAuliffe Miller, Esq.; The Rev. Jim Jenkins, Deacon; Ms. Ginnie Schoonover; Mr. Ty Welles, Esq.**

Could we be better stewards of God's gifts if we were one diocese rather than two? Can we adapt structures to better equip congregations and resource ministries in our regions? In the first phases of our work on the Reunification Discernment Committee, this sub-team on stewardship and structure focused on gathering and beginning to analyze geographic, financial, and congregational data. In this report we include some statistics, a basic financial picture of each diocese, diocesan staffing configurations and offer some interpretation. As the discernment continues, this sub-team will explore other structural dimensions of this process, including governance and canons as the Committee designs a model for further collaboration and possible reunification.

Both dioceses are very similar in terms of membership, number of parishes, staffing and financial resources. There is a similar mix of rural and urban churches. The most significant difference is geographic size with Central Pennsylvania being nearly twice as large. The diocesan staffs are similar in size, but organized differently. Bethlehem has a more decentralized model. Central PA uses a more centralized approach and also includes staffing for the Stevenson School.

Financial resources for the two dioceses are similar. As of December 31, 2022, Bethlehem had \$14.7 million in investments and held an additional \$17.2 million for its parishes. Central Pennsylvania had \$9.7 million in investments and held an additional \$15.5 million for its parishes. Neither Diocese reports any significant indebtedness other than funds held on behalf of the parishes.

In the most recent Parochial Data Report, both dioceses had a significant decrease in Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) in the past ten years. Bethlehem's decrease was 48.5% (3,594 to 1,851) and Central PA's was 46.3% (4,536 to 2,436). This is slightly higher than for the Episcopal Church overall which decreased 43.2%. We acknowledge that such decrease is happening in almost every Episcopal diocese, and across denominations.

Both Dioceses are responding to the reality of declining numbers, actively addressing the call to steward our resources, and innovating ways to support vibrant ministry throughout our regions. The Diocese of Bethlehem introduced a reconfigured Convocation and Assembly model that fostered a decentralized approach to leadership and recently implemented a Canon Missioner model to foster care and collaboration among church leaders and congregations. They also recently launched two new Latinx congregations in Bethlehem and Allentown. The Diocese of Central PA introduced "Shaped by Faith," a three-part initiative to create a Diocese best shaped to serve God's mission. Church leaders are given new tools and new ways to help congregations relate to their community, understand their resources, and create sustainable ways of being church.

### **Geography, Population, and Parochial Report Data**

The Diocese of Bethlehem is comprised of fourteen counties totaling an area of 7,834 square miles with a total population of 2,465,678. Ten counties have a population greater than 150,000. Four counties have a population less than 100,000.

The Diocese of Central PA is comprised of 24 counties totaling an area of 16,902 square miles with a total population of 2,609,628. Six counties have a population greater than 150,000. Ten counties have a population less than 100,000.

In the Diocese of Bethlehem 57 parishes filed the Parochial Report for 2022 and reported a total membership of 7,242. Average total Sunday attendance (ASA) was 1,851 and total pledge and plate giving for the year was \$4,904,842

In the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, 61 parishes filed the Parochial Report for 2022 and reported a total membership of 8,403. Average total Sunday attendance (ASA) was 2,436 and total pledge and plate giving for the year was \$8,258,772.

## Diocesan Staff Configurations

### The Staff of the Diocese of Bethlehem (Total of 7.125 FTEs)

Bishop (1), Canon for Mission Resources / COO (1),  
 Canon for Racial Reconciliation and Community Engagement (1),  
 Northern Canon Missioner & Assistant (1), Southern Canon Missioner & Assistant (1),  
 Bookkeeper (1), Missioner for Finance & Administration (1),  
 Safe-guarding / Communications Consultant (Contractor) (.125)

### The Staff of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania (Total of 8.5 FTEs)

Bishop (1), Canon for Finance and Operations (1), Bookkeeper (.5),  
 Canon for Communications and Events (1), Communications Assistant (.40),  
 Executive Assistant to the Bishop (.75)/ Assistant for Events (.25),  
 Canon for Children Youth & Families and Safeguarding Administrator (.75),  
 Associate for Congregational Vitality & SBF and Interim Transition Officer (.75),  
 Dean Stevenson School (1), Associate Dean (.25),  
 Archivist, Receptionist, HR Administrator (.5), Property Manager (.40)

## Financial Detail

### Diocesan Endowments

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	Average
<b>Bethlehem</b>						
Investments						
Diocese	14,724,605	17,505,065	15,426,253	13,989,961	11,764,192	14,682,015
Custodian - Parish	17,205,316	20,826,020	18,705,529	17,849,370	15,155,662	17,948,379
<b>Central Pennsylvania</b>						
Investments						
Diocese	9,722,935	12,009,864	10,735,038	11,263,071	10,090,997	10,764,381
Custodian - Parish	15,494,272	19,669,969	17,144,953	15,965,072	13,683,990	16,391,651

Note: CPA data for 2022, audit for 2021 is underway.

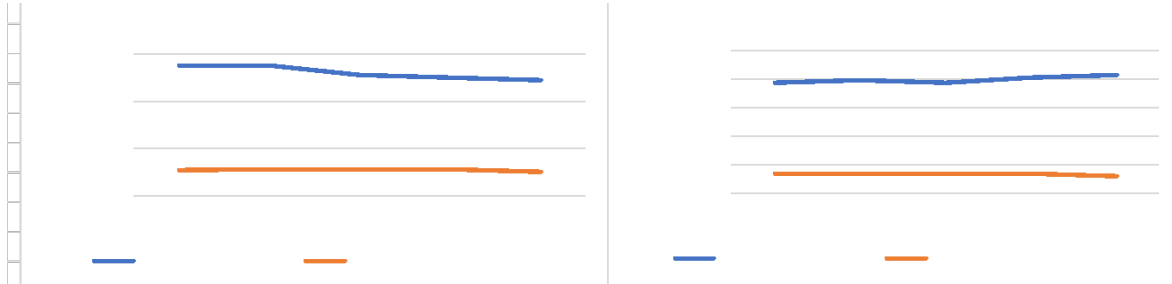
### Diocesan Budgets

	2022	2021	2022	2021
<b>Bethlehem</b>		<b>Central Pennsylvania</b>		
<b>Income</b>				
Parish Support	1,036,840	1,112,247	1,201,783	1,392,478
Investment	217,144	252,053	742,707	373,584
Other	62,832	108,997	750,822	373,136
Total Income	1,316,816	1,473,297	2,695,312	2,139,198
<b>Expenses</b>				
Salary & Benefits	917,364	632,538	1,015,074	1,129,525
Total	1,372,831	1,011,901	2,668,381	2,187,568

Note: CPA data for 2022, audit for 2021 is underway.

**Fair Share and Trends**

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Average
<b>Bethlehem</b>						
Plate & Pledge (1)	5,511,558	5,539,154	5,139,757	4,994,771	4,904,842	5,218,016
Parish Support to Diocese	1,057,425	1,097,907	1,115,807	1,112,247	1,036,840	1,084,045
<b>Central Pennsylvania</b>						
Plate & Pledge (1)	7,804,720	7,947,203	7,726,451	8,074,758	8,258,772	7,962,381
Parish Support to Diocese	1,319,172	1,385,132	1,371,285	1,392,478	1,201,783	1,333,970



(1) Plate and Pledge income received from parishes is based on Parochial Reports.  
Blue = pledge and plate, Red = Parish Support to Diocese

**Mission and Program**

**Committee Members: The Rev. Dr. Sidnie Crawford, Ms. Drew Dorgan, Mr. George Park**

**Congregational Survey**

One of the first tasks this sub-team undertook was a survey we sent out to every parish in our dioceses. There was a high rate of return. People were excited to share what’s going on in their congregations. Survey results revealed the importance of liturgical ministries, services of worship, and an inspiring number of outreach and social justice efforts at the congregational level. We share a passion across our dioceses for common prayer and the gospel imperatives to welcome the stranger, feed those who hunger, and offer shelter to those in need.

**Structures which Facilitate Collaborative Mission and Program**

Both dioceses are innovating ways to support vibrant ministry throughout our regions. As mentioned earlier in this report, the Diocese of Bethlehem introduced a reconfigured Convocation and Assembly model and added Canon Missioners to support cooperation among parishes, including programmatic and missional offerings. In the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, “Shaped By Faith” has helped congregations adapt in ways that better support and sustain mission-focused opportunities.



## **Lay and Clergy Formation**

Both dioceses have an active Commission on Ministry (COM) to oversee the ordination process and licensed lay ministries. The processes toward ordination have many commonalities but also differences that will need to be addressed as this discernment process continues. Both dioceses provide several paths toward ordination. Both are seeking ways to tend to the current shortage of clergy in the Episcopal Church and the growing need for bi-vocational and part-time priests.

In Central Pennsylvania, the Bishop recently convened a committee of clergy and lay leaders to review the road to ordination, the road to lay leadership, and the resources available for helping formation in this changing landscape. The committee developed the “Road to Ordination” tool. The COM refined their materials and implemented an Individualized Formation Plan instrument to design and manage the formation portfolios of candidates while helping them move through the process.

The Diocese of Central Pennsylvania has the Stevenson School for Ministry which is dedicated to forming disciples for lay and ordained life and ministry. The Diocese of Bethlehem also has students participating in these programs.

The Diocese of Bethlehem hosts an annual formation event called “Gather,” which focuses on a theme related to diocesan priorities and offers formation for lay and clergy church leaders. In Spring of 2024, The Diocese of Central Pennsylvania will participate in the Gather event. In Bethlehem, a recent *For Our Common Life* series of events focused on going deeply into themes of racial justice, inclusion and Latinx ministry and introduced speakers from across the church.

## **Children and Youth Ministries**

In both dioceses, children and youth ministry takes place primarily at the parish and convocation level. A cohort of youth from the Diocese of Bethlehem attended the Episcopal Church Youth Event in Baltimore and is springboarding a new diocesan youth ministry focus. The Diocese of Central Pennsylvania has a part-time staff position for Children & Youth and is in the process of forming an Advisory Board for youth ministry made up of interested youth and adults from across the diocese.

## **Social Justice Ministries**

**Dismantling Racism** is a priority in both dioceses. In the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, a Commission is charged with creating a clear, compassionate, and effective strategy for dismantling systemic and institutional racism in the diocese and overseeing its implementation. The Diocese of Bethlehem has a Canon for Racial Reconciliation and Community Engagement and a Racial Justice and Reconciliation Task Force. The Task Force is involved in various initiatives and organizes diocesan-wide events, such as the recent services commemorating Juneteenth, Absalom Jones and The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. They also promote and support engagement with the Episcopal Church’s Sacred Ground curriculum and offer resources and formation opportunities on racial justice and reconciliation for churches and individuals, including youth and children.

Both dioceses have a commitment to **LGBTQIA+ inclusion** at congregational, convocation and diocesan levels. Leaders from across the Diocese of Bethlehem have led PRIDE services and celebrations, created monthly gatherings for the queer community (Queer Spirituality Nights), and engaged with community leaders and organizations to offer formation opportunities. Advocacy, visibility, and fellowship are at the core of these efforts.

The Diocese of Central Pennsylvania has lay people, priests and deacons offer prayer and connection through visits and in pen pal relationships with those incarcerated in local prisons through **Prison Ministries**. Their **Creation Care** mission and ministries are shaped by the three goals of the Episcopal Creation Care Covenant: loving formation, liberating advocacy, and life-giving conservation. **Migration Ministries** in Central Pennsylvania are dedicated to helping area asylees and refugees feel welcomed and supported as neighbors.

Both Diocesan Bishops and many congregations are active in efforts against gun violence through Bishops United Against Gun Violence and other local and national initiatives. Bishop Scanlan helped launch **Saving Lives: Ending Gun Violence**, a state-wide education and advocacy effort. She is joined by Bishop Nichols, as well as other Episcopal bishops, clergy, and laity, and leaders from other faith traditions.

### **A Global Partnership**

The Diocese of Bethlehem has a long-term relationship with the Diocese of Kajo Keji in the Province of South Sudan. A primary focus has been helping Kajo Keji improve its educational resources by raising money to build five primary schools and a high school, as well as a college for seminarians and lay leaders. The violence in South Sudan and the pandemic, as well as tensions in the Anglican Communion have made this relationship even more valuable. Bishop Nichols and Deacon Charlie Barebo traveled to Kajo Keji in 2020 and will be returning in 2024.

## **An Episcopate for Our Time**

**Submitted by: The Rt. Rev. Kevin Nichols, Diocese of Bethlehem**

**The Rt. Rev. Audrey Scanlan, Diocese of Central Pennsylvania**

In the service of Ordination of a bishop (BCP pgs. 512-523) there are, as in other ordination rites, a Presentation, an Examination, a profession of faith, and a prayer of Consecration as the ordinand accepts the position described to them and receives the laying on of hands in apostolic succession- connecting all that happens on that ordination day to the church through the ages and all the way back to the life and ministry of Jesus, who told Simon Peter: "On this rock (Peter), I will build my church." (Matthew 16:28). That Jesus chose Peter, (a disciple who displayed a great number of human faults in his earnest attempt to follow our Lord) to found the church is a statement of faith that *by* faith God can work in us "infinitely more than we can ask or imagine," (Ephesians 3:20) and that the business of church and its leadership is a partnership between a powerful and loving God, and well-meaning humans.

As bishops, we are asked to guard the faith, discipline, and worship of the church. We vow to be faithful in prayer and in the study of Holy Scripture seeking the mind of Christ. Using the Gospel of Christ, we are charged to enlighten the minds and stir up the conscience of our people and to support them in their own ministries. We are charged with the role of ordaining priests and deacons, of faithfully administering the sacraments, and to reach out to defend those who have no helper, showing the compassion and mercy of Christ. We vow to work alongside our fellow bishops in the councils of the church working for its unity, and to strengthen the clergy in our care for their participation in God's mission.

The word "episcopal" comes from the Greek word, *episkopos* which means "overseer." Much of our day-to-day functioning comes under this charge to oversee. We envision strategic priorities (*Shaped by Faith* in the Diocese of Central PA and *The 5 Priorities* of the Diocese of Bethlehem,) preside at meetings of Trustees, Diocesan Council and Conventions. We offer administrative guidance to Staff, Committees and Task Forces and leadership in crises. We also provide direction and pastoral care in harrowing and heartbreaking moments.

As your bishops, we want to express, first, our love and gratitude to our dioceses for trusting us with the awesome responsibility of serving in this role. In our work, we have striven to be faithful to our vows and responsive to the needs of our diocese(s). We also want to affirm that this is a ministry of partnership and that the only way forward is together, with God and each other, to travel a holy path.

As our current times have shown us, the religious landscape of our country is changing; We are eager to find new ways and adapt to organize our church for vitality and continued strength in serving God's mission. We are also keen to hold fast to those things that serve us well and that are key to our Anglican identity: an appreciation for the incarnational nature of our tradition and its relational emphasis; ordered, sacramental worship; service to the most vulnerable among us - especially in the places where God has planted us; building the Beloved Community and support for ongoing formation in the faith.

If, after study and prayerful discernment, our Conventions decide that reunification as one diocese is the best path to follow for our continued service to Christ, then changes to the exercise of the episcopate will be necessary. While the charges outlined above will remain the same, how we exercise episcopal ministry in all its fulsomeness will require new practices.

### **A large geographic region**

A reunified diocese would cover East to West 168 miles, North to South 153 miles, 38 Counties, and an area of approximately 24,000 square miles. This is a land mass roughly the size of West Virginia and still smaller than other dioceses in the Episcopal Church that have one bishop- the reunified diocese would be namely, 2/3 the size of Maine and Indiana, less than half the size of Wisconsin, 1/3 size of Minnesota and 1/5 size of New Mexico.

In our conversations with our bishop colleagues, we have learned about how they organize their time and travel to be accessible to their congregations and people: They arrange for extended regional visits, coordinate visitations with other events, deploy staff in different areas of the diocese, share authority with regional leaders, and use resigned (retired) bishops when necessary for sacramental functions. In a reunified diocese we imagine that a model using dispersed Regional Canons to assist in Transition Ministry and Pastoral Care of clergy will work well - the Diocese of Bethlehem is in their second full year of using this model. And a greater emphasis on the role and function of Convocation Convenors (lay and clergy) will support good communication between the office of the bishop and individual parishes allowing for the bishop's attentiveness to immediate needs.

### **Sacramental functions**

Confirmations, Receptions, Ordinations, Celebrations of New Ministry, and other bishop-appointed liturgical functions (blessing of particular objects, deconsecrations, participation in interfaith and ecumenical liturgical events) are an important part of the bishop's work. Careful advance planning and collaboration among parishes will ensure a reasonable time frame for these episcopal events.

### **Relationships**

Care for clergy and lay people alike is important to us. Coffee hours and vestry meetings, celebrations of individual achievements and milestones, tending to each other in the joys and hardships of life are important as we live as the Body of Christ. There is a commitment on our part to continued fellowship and support of clergy and laypeople in our common life together. Making use of regional visits in which the bishop can share in the life of our people- not just on a Sunday but in extended visits- is an important way to maintain our relationships. The use of zoom and other technology also allows us to gather when the need to be together is more immediate.

## **Possible Phases in Reunification for the Bishop(s)**

Several options present themselves in potentially transitioning to a reunified diocese:

- Both bishops remain in place for a time and are appointed as Assisting Bishops in each other's diocese. This would allow for the bishops to perform sacramental functions in both dioceses, explore the breadth of the new geographic land mass, and build trust and relationships across the newly reunited diocese. We see this as a possible first step following reunification.
- One of the bishops could resign (retire) or accept a call to another diocese to serve as diocesan, assisting or provisional bishop. The reunified diocese would be served by the remaining bishop.
- With one bishop remaining to serve the reunified diocese, their work would be understood as transitional, and after a time of settling, they would work with the Standing Committee to begin a search for a new bishop to serve the reunified diocese. We believe that this is an important option to consider as an entirely new bishop would be called to serve the new entity, affirming that in God, all things are made new. (Revelation 21)

We are interested in learning about the areas of our ministry that you would like us to explore more closely as we work to create options and design models for our consideration in the next year. We engage this work with gratitude for our dioceses and this good work, we are yours in the Way of Love.

## **Next Steps in this Discernment Process**

Over the next several months, this Discernment Committee will continue to analyze data, focus on areas brought forward for greater attention, and remain in conversation with dioceses and bishops in similar processes. We will offer further opportunities for regular communication, increased engagement and broader input across our dioceses as we consider models for further collaboration between dioceses, possible reunification, and a timeline for transitions.

Our Committee will prepare recommendations to consider at the 2024 Diocesan Conventions. As we continue in the process, we will allow the initial questions for discernment to guide us while the Spirit does her work among us. Can the process of reunification help create a more sustainable and life-giving way forward for the Episcopal Church in our regions? Can we more faithfully steward our church's resources and more effectively equip our congregations for being church now if we become one diocese instead of two? Can we more consistently and creatively form disciples of Jesus, more impactfully tend to the brokenness in this world if we become one?

### **Diocese of Central Pennsylvania**

Ms. Drew Dorgan, Standing Committee  
The Rev. John Harwood, Diocesan Council  
The Rev. Jim Jenkins, At-large  
Mr. George Park, At-large  
Mr. Michael McAuliffe Miller, Esq, Vice Chancellor  
The Rt. Rev. Audrey Scanlan, Bishop

### **Diocese of Bethlehem**

The Rev. Rodney Conn, At-large  
The Rev. Sidnie Crawford, Diocesan Council  
The Rev. Douglas Moyer, Standing Committee  
Ms. Ginnie Schoonover, At-Large  
Mr. Ty Welles, Esq, Assistant Chancellor  
The Rt. Rev. Kevin Nichols, Bishop