

**Dioceses of Bethlehem and Central Pennsylvania
Reunification Discernment Committee
March 12, 2024
Meeting Notes**

Focus Themes: Expanding Participation, Increasing Engagement, Building Models

Opening Prayer (Chaplains)

Building Models

- **Mapping/Structure Update**

- This subcommittee spoke to Bishop Sean Rowe (read about him here: <https://episcopalpartnership.org/our-bishop/>. The Rt. Rev. Sean Rowe was ordained bishop of the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania in 2007 and became bishop provisional of Western New York in 2019. He previously served as bishop provisional of the Diocese of Bethlehem from 2014 until 2018.) Bishop Rowe offered insights into how he reorganized the Diocese of Bethlehem and formed a special collaboration between the Diocese of Western New York and the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania.
- The group started to map the geography of both our Dioceses, looking at where the Parishes are located and how the convocations are configured.
- Appointments were made to talk to the Deans of the Cathedrals in both Diocese and the Rectors of the Pro Cathedrals. Bishop Audrey mentioned that there may be an obscure canon that states Pro Cathedrals are designated by a bishop (like the Central Pennsylvania Pro Cathedral, Trinity in Williamsport was designated by Bishop Baxter), but that title dissolves when that Bishop retires or leaves the Diocese.

- **Ministry of the Episcopate** (Bishops Audrey & Kevin)

- Video of our Bishops at the House of Bishops meetings is posted online.
- Bishop Audrey has developed three different ways that episcopal visitation could be accomplished to meet the needs of a reunified diocese, and she and Bishop Kevin are studying these ideas:
 - Visit by region. This would require that some parishes would have to have a Saturday or Wednesday visitation instead of all visitations taking place on Sunday. Dioceses in Minnesota, Nebraska, and Wisconsin are doing visits this way instead of all Sunday visits.
 - Visits could be stretched across a 3-year model versus a 2-year model.
 - As some of our less viable parishes close, the new Bishop would be working with a reduced number of parishes. Instead of approximately 60 parishes in each Diocese, that number may be reduced to 50 in each diocese in the future.

- **Staff Structure** (Bishops Audrey and Kevin w/overlaps)
 - Reviewing disbursed versus centralized staffing models. Right now the Diocese of Bethlehem has a decentralized leadership model with authority disbursed across the regions, vested in the two Canon Missioners. Central PA is working to make some similar changes now to try some of the decentralized leadership models.
 - We are summarizing areas of staffing needs. For example, Central PA has youth and communications staff, but Dio Beth does not. DioBeth has LatinX and other missioners that Central PA does not have.

- **Financial and Property Resources** (Jim, Mike, Ginnie, Treasurers, COOs, Fin. Comm.)
 - We discussed the budget and looked at a broad comparison of the possible increase in uncommitted funds we would have by having only one Bishop. This might give us extra money back into our parishes through granting or assessment relief. As noted, Bishop Rowe is a trusted voice that has walked through Diocesan transitions and he had this to tell us, “This will help you with mission.”
 - The Finance subcommittee is studying the apportionment formulas in both Dioceses as well as apportionment models used in other Dioceses.

- **Constitution and Canons** (Ty, Michael, Linda, Chancellors,...)
 - The Constitution and Canons of both Diocese were cross-referenced by five lawyers. The actual provisions are very close to each other, so the task of developing a unified Constitution and Canons should not be difficult.
 - All sections of our Canons will be searched and compared with those of other newly formed Dioceses to see what might need to be added.
 - Considering whether we stay with the traditional models of the Council of Trustees and Standing Committee as in the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania or a scaled-down model of leadership as in the Diocese of Bethlehem.
 - Dio Beth has common by-laws that are the same for all parishes. Dio CPA is starting to talk about common by-laws.

- **Timeframe for Vote on Juncture** (Full Committee)
 - Overall calendar from the joint convention calls for a model to be presented at our joint October conventions.
 - Diocese of Bethlehem Gather event in May is an opportunity to get more input and share more information with leadership in both Dioceses.
 - The joint clergy conference in May is another opportunity to increase engagement and awareness in order to help keep information flowing.

- **Timeframe for Vote on Juncture** (Full Committee)
 - Review of Convocation Meetings and the questions raised in them. We need to share the reports and questions from those meetings.
 - Chris Sutton shared a summary of her convocation meeting's concerns and questions:
 - Parishes being lost or forgotten.
 - Will this help us with diversity?
 - The visiting cycle of the bishop.
 - Would there be one bishop?
 - By-laws came up.
 - Apportionments.
 - Time frame.
 - A suggestion was made that we create a one-page summary of the various models and a one-page summary of what reunification would look like. Using an adult forum-type model, we could present our findings at Gather: "Train the Trainer."
 - Find out if there is an email list of delegates to the Diocesan Conventions. Send them an education packet.
 - Chris and Jane (our chaplains) will publish a prayer for the committee that could be used throughout the diocese in the Prayers of the People as we continue to discern.