

Bishop’s Pastoral Letter

Season of Pentecost

July 31, 2020

My Dearest Family,

Greetings in our Lord and Savior Jesus’ name!

I write to communicate to our diocesan family some pertinent information and recent developments in the diocese.

**Retirement & Appointment:**

Our Diocesan Chancellor of over 18 years, Mr. Ernest Cornbrooks, Esq., wrote to inform me of his decision to resign from his role as Diocesan Chancellor effective August 1, 2020. Mr. Cornbrooks, Ernie, had intimated his decision to retire some time ago. However, through my encouragement, he has continued serving. Ernie felt that the time has come for the diocese to begin cultivating and nurturing new leadership in this area of ministry. The position of chancellor is a highly specialized calling in the Episcopal Church and one that is always difficult to fill in any diocese, and even more challenging in small dioceses like ours. Ernie has recommended Mr. Regan J. Smith, Esq., who is a member of St. Paul’s by-the Sea, Ocean City and currently serves as Church Attorney for the diocese, to fill the role. Regan has accepted the bishop’s invitation to serve in the vital ministry as our next Diocesan Chancellor.

Furthermore, I mindfully want to ensure that the diocese preserves our institutional memory, especially at this time of transformation, renewal and revival across the diocese. Upon the recommendation of Regan, our new Diocesan Chancellor, and after sharing this desire with the Standing Committee, I have appointed Mr. Cornbrooks as our Diocesan Chancellor Emeritus. This honorific title will allow me and the new chancellor to access Ernie’s years of wisdom and experience. At an appropriate time in the future, we will celebrate Mr. Cornbrooks’ years of faithful ministry to multiple bishops and to the diocese at large.

Diocesan Council, at its regular meeting on Monday, July 27, voted to ratify these appointments.

**Board of Managers:**

The Board of Managers will also have a new Vice-Chair to replace Mr. Albert Smith, who has served in the role for numerous years. Al’s leadership has been instrumental in wisely and prudently guiding the effective and sensitive work of the Easton Episcopal Funds. This fund manages the endowments of the diocese and parishes that have chosen to have their endowments invested by the Easton Episcopal Funds. In the interest of institutional memory, I have appointed Al Smith, Vice-Chair Emeritus of the Board of Managers. He will function as a non-voting member. Mr. Chris Maxwell, member of St. Paul’s Parish, Kent, was nominated to the position of Vice-Chair pursuant to Article XI. Sec.3 (a). The bishop acts as the chair.

The Board of Managers continues to do a stellar job in managing the funds in an extremely prudent, conservative but effective manner. The hallmarks of this ministry have been diligence and accountability as they act as good and faithful stewards of God’s resources entrusted to the diocese. The board has been meeting on a regular basis every Monday to review the previous week’s developments in the stock market and to access its direction and make necessary adjustments to the portfolio. On behalf of the diocese, I want to extend our deep appreciation and prayers to the members of the board for their faithfulness and dedication.

**Ordinations**:

The ordination of diaconal candidates is scheduled to proceed in the fall. It will be in an abbreviated format concomitant with the challenges presented by COVID-19 Pandemic Protocols in effect by state, CDC and diocese at that time. In deference to strict observance of the guidelines, each diaconal candidate wherever possible, will be ordained in their respective home parish subject to the approval of their parish priest and vestry. The date for each ordination will be set by the parish and diaconal candidate in consultation with the bishop. Please stay tuned for future communications as the plans for these ordinations continue to be developed.

**Seminarians:**

Susan Leight, second year seminarian, sponsored by Christ Church-St. Peter’s Parish, Easton, returns to Virginia Seminary, Alexandria, VA. We continue to hold Susan and AK, her husband, and children in our prayers. Our diocesan family sends her off with our best wishes.

Susannah Southern, St. Alban’s Parish, Salisbury, was accepted to the University of the South School of Theology, Sewanee, TN, to commence her study and training for the ordained ministry. Susannah and her husband Dave are leaving at the end of July to take up residence on campus. The diocese offers our continued prayers and God’s guidance as they begin their seminary journey leading to ordination to the Order of Sacred Priesthood.

**Bishop’s Institute Training Workshop**:

The Bishop’s Institute will commence a two-session training initiative for Worship Leaders, September 1st & 8th. Worship Leaders whose licenses to officiate as Worship Leader has expired, or is about to be expired, are especially encouraged to register for the training. The bishop will not renew anyone’s license to officiate as Worship Leader without proof of this new requirement in formation as Worship Leader. And, anyone desirous of serving as licensed Worship Leader is strongly encouraged to register and attend.

**Parish Apportionment:**

At its Monday, July 27th, meeting Diocesan Council reviewed the income and expenses of the diocese and acknowledged, with gratitude and appreciation, the continued dedication and commitment of our family of churches. Parishes have maintained their apportionment contribution to the ministry of this church. As a result of this faithfulness your diocese is in a good position to fulfill its commitment to the Episcopal Church’s apportionment including other essential mission and ministry budgetary commitments. We express our gratitude to each and every member of the diocesan family that continues to remain faithful to their churches. It is a testament to your faith and confidence in God to see us through this unprecedented crisis.

**Resumption of Bishop’s Parish Visitation:**

It is my intention to resume episcopal visitations this fall subject to state, CDC and diocesan protocols. I intend to strictly follow the Diocesan Protocols during my visitations. My first visitation is to St. Mary the Virgin, Pocomoke City on Sunday, August 30th.

**Exploring Adaptive Liturgies in a Time of Pandemic:**

General Convention 2018 adopted Resolution A068 permitting bishops and Diocesan Liturgical Commissions to explore experimentation and the creation of alternative texts to offer to their local dioceses and wider church. Diocesan Convention 2020 approved the creation of a Diocesan Liturgical Commission to address this area of our common life. The Reverend Mark Delcuze consented to head the commission. In early fall I intend to add additional members from among lay and clergy reflecting the breath of creativity across the body of Christ in our beloved diocese and provide a mandate. Bishops at our recently convened House of Bishops meeting (July 28th and 29th) were reminded to aggressively pursue this resolution especially in this time of pandemic.

I am extremely gratified and inspired to witness the numerous creative adaptable liturgies in use in our diocese during the COVID-19 Pandemic. It leaves me breathless as I follow online worship across the diocese. It is obvious the energy and momentum are palpable. We credit much of this to our openness to the Spirit’s prompting.

**Bishop’s Pastoral Thoughts:**

It is the overwhelming feeling of all bishops in the Episcopal Church that these are unprecedented times. The style of leadership the church requires at this time needs to be adaptive, creative and extremely pastoral, because both clergy and lay are dealing with unforeseen difficulties without a manual to go by, other than our continued reliance on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide.

To date, obedience to God has defined my 43 years of global ministry and this characteristic has not failed or disappointed. I realize that sometimes I have not shared certain critical challenges but, with the additional burden of people taking on unknowns, which have defined the shifting reality of the pandemic, bishops are required to react based on spiritual discernment and good counsel from strategic personnel. As your bishop, I have practiced consultative leadership, but sometimes consultative leadership needed to give way to imminent leadership because the situation required that model of leadership.

You called me to be your bishop and I have dedicated my energy and life to fulfill this high calling and devotion. I promised very early in this vocation to bring new focuses, creativity, ideas and directions that are relevant to prevailing reality and that are the intentional direction of the Episcopal Church. The ultimate intentionality is geared to position our diocese on the ‘cutting edge’ of mission and ministry for the 21st century context.

As you graciously trusted God and your bishop with that burden. I constantly self-critique myself to discern that I am living up to this high calling. Without exception, there are far more people who were never in the frontline of diocesan leadership that are drawn to the center of that role now than when I began in October 2016. This church has evolved to embody the characteristics of an ‘expanding tent’. I thank God for this fresh wisdom and insights.

Along with every other bishop in the church, I need your prayers and support as I continue to serve the diocese. Criticisms, though justified at times, are unhelpful when challenged by a dangerous debilitating crisis to humanity and the future survivability of people, including the structures that support the way of life. No human person, except Jesus, was designed to be perfect. We are flayed but in spite of that inherent human tragedy, we all strive diligently to give our best hoping and praying that it would be pleasing to God in giving honor and dignity to God and God’s work of healing a broken and troubled world.

We continue to give thanks to God for sustaining the diocese in a period of extreme austerity, as a lethal pandemic is devastating the world and our nation. The drastic interruption of life as we know it has been extremely challenging and grueling. Its changing reality is affecting every facet of the human enterprise creating untold hardships and uncertainties among God’s people. As a church, we are called to continue praying for an alleviation of the pandemic and the development of a viable cure.

In our diocese, my first and foremost obligation is to ensure the health and safety of God’s people. Together as a diocesan family, we will prevail over the crisis of this pandemic with God as our protector and guide.

In the meantime, I urge each of you in our family, and beyond, to remain vigilant and astute, adhering to all health and safety directives. You are encouraged to follow all of the guidelines issued by the diocese in so far as your health, safety and well-being are concerned in our churches.

My beloved, we shall navigate this crisis together and, with the Spirit’s guidance and sustenance, emerge out of it a much stronger, hopeful, more informed, loving, caring and devoted people of God. We are growing as faithful people that love and care for each other’s safety and well-being. We must continue to be a community of faith defined by Jesus’ Way of Love as well as our love for each other. As St. John, in the 4th Chapter of his 1st Epistle reminds us, “God is love and those who live in love, live in God, and God lives in them.”

I wish each and every one a safe summer and urge you to practice safety protocols at all times.

With all my love and gratitude for the trust and confidence placed in me by God and Jesus’ servant among you.

Your friend and bishop,

+*San*