

## **Opening Remarks**

**The Right Reverend Mary Gray-Reeves**

**15 November 2025**

Good morning, friends, it is good to be with you. I am Mary Gray-Reeves, a bishop of The Episcopal Church and a Conflict Transformation Practitioner. I have worn a variety of hats in the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I am a lifelong Episcopalian. It is easy for those of us who spend a lot of time in the world of church to play a number of roles, but my ministry these days is focused on walking with communities who wish to move through the challenges in which they find themselves and to help them invigorate their ministry of reconciliation. I believe – and have witnessed - that conflict, gathered in Christ, can be reconciled. We can be brought back to the ‘complete joy’ of which Jesus speaks in the 15th chapter of the gospel of John.

So, I promise you I am not here in Maryland just for the crab cakes and oysters! Although I have committed to members of the Steering Committee that I will engage in much sampling!

Let me begin with gratitude.

I offer heartfelt thanks to each one of you for being here today. You have given up a Saturday to come and be present; to ‘gather, listen and connect’. You have chosen to come into a space where you will be invited to be vulnerable and offer your courage. These are personal and powerful gifts; no small offering to God and the Body of Christ. Our baptism, in which we share, invites us into vulnerability, courage, bold exploration and adventure. Baptism is a lifetime journey of transformation. It can only happen when we show up and join in the work of the Holy Spirit. Thank you for bringing the gift of your presence. If you are comfortable with the idea, take a moment, acknowledge someone near you and say ‘thank you for coming’, or offer a nod of gratitude.

I would like to thank the Standing Committee for inviting me into the diocese to walk alongside you. I thank the Presiding Bishop and his staff for

supporting us in this process, especially to Rebecca Wilson, who we will hear from this afternoon.

Thank you to our amazing Steering Committee members who have done tremendous work in just a few short months, creating this holy and energetic space for our gathering. From building prayerful community that empowered the discernment of our agenda to creating your resource packet to making sure there are extra pens on the table, by the power of the Spirit and with great love for this diocesan community, they have provided our space for formation today.

In the confirmation email you received, you should have all the resources you need to fully participate. Printed copies are included in the packet you received this morning. The materials will remain online and accessible for the foreseeable future.

The steering committee and speakers are seated here and can assist you with any personal needs you may have. We have a team of trained chaplains in the event that you need to speak, pray or sit with someone – or otherwise need support. They will also be available for laying on of hands and the rite of reconciliation during the communion at our Eucharist this afternoon: The Rev. Andrew Cropper; The Rev. Jody E. Gunn; Wesley (Wes) Parks; The Rev. Dr. Terry-Thomas Primer; and The Rev. Jessica Stehle.

You are seated in small groups at round tables, a configuration that is supportive of attentive listening and engaging in conversation. It is presumably random, although, my experience is that the Holy Spirit places us where we need to be so we can do the work to which God is inviting us today.

That said, we must listen to ourselves and our instincts regarding our sense of personal safety. If you are uncomfortable, for any reason where you are seated, you can make a move to a place that feels more appropriate for you today. The chaplains or members of the steering committee can assist you in making a shift.

Our primary focus today is to begin a public process of formation to empower reconciliation in the Diocese of Easton. The most basic component of this formation is listening – to God, to oneself and to one another. I believe listening is a spiritual practice and is part of a Christian's lifelong formation. It is helpful to everyone to deepen their listening skills, but for us as people of faith, it a critical tool for living out the ministry of the church. In just a moment you will receive some very specific instructions called Mutual Invitation to support this necessary component of reconciliation. We ask that you use this disciplined approach for all your table conversations.

We will also use a form of Bible Study called Lectio Divina, that will help us to dwell in the scriptures together rather than talk about them. The questions for sharing are designed not to test our knowledge about the text, but to explore our experience with what it has to say to us personally and as a group. Again, this is a different approach than is often used. We invite you to join in it and see where God leads.

We have newsprint and markers on the tables to record your thoughts and insights. You are not asked to record anything from the Lectio Divina conversation but will be asked to do so for the other two table conversations. This instruction will be repeated later, but, essentially, we hope you will record what you have to say on the sheets and then put them up on the walls around the room. We do not have time for each group to report out, so please create statements that directly respond to the questions. What you write on the newsprint will be compiled, verbatim, and shared in the diocese for the purposes of hearing one another and for corporate discernment.

A final practice as we move through our day, is to resist sharing every detail of the narrative of the personal stories you will share at your tables. Our stories are holy; they are treasures and dear to us.

Sometimes we can get caught up in them as we revisit them. The first two questions after the keynote address ask for personal stories and experiences. Remaining mindful of time and exercising an economy of words can help us more precisely share the point of our story and give us a

chance to hear everyone at our table. You will have a few minutes of silence to think about what you want to share, which can help you organize your thoughts.

The responses to the second set of questions after the keynote are what will go on the newsprint. You will also use the newsprint for the small group question after Rebecca Wilson's presentation and plenary Q and A session. To further support you, in a few minutes, along with instructions for our Lectio Divina, our Bible Study, and Mutual Invitation, you will be asked to choose a facilitator at your table. This should be a person who can keep time for participants at the table so that everyone can share and be heard.

Today we make a public and diocesan-wide beginning to be formed together in a way that supports conflict transformation and to address some of the concerns in our midst. I understand that the Standing Committee is committed to holding further gatherings as needed, so that it may be properly prepared for the next episcopate in the Diocese of Easton. Thank you again for being here. You are essential to this process.

Now I invite James Martinez and Chrissy Aull to come forward to give us our instructions.

Instructions come next, followed by Lectio.