

The 237th Annual Convention

A Report by Lola Michael Russell

The seemingly straight forward road to the Episcopal Church in Delaware's 237th convention, ultimately turned out to have some bumps and unexpected twists and turns. After last year's virtual convention, held at the height of the Covid pandemic, it was with high hopes that this year's convention originally was planned to be hybrid – partly in person yet accessible online as well. It was to have been held at the hospitable St. Andrews's School, Middletown. Accordingly, plans were put into motion. In addition to many Zoom meetings, site visits were made, and decisions determined for the in-person convention. Then, Covid reality struck again.

So many times, in the past 18 months of pandemic, our collective hopes and plans have had to change with changing circumstances. If nothing else, the pandemic has taught us, as Robert Louis Stevenson said, "The true wisdom is to be always seasonable and to change with a good grace in changing circumstances."

So it was with good grace that the convention team began to plan a fully online convention after the bishop's sound decision that, with the Delta variant rampant, it would be unwise to gather some 100+ people together for an in-person gathering, especially as last year's convention had shown us that we could hold a very successful virtual event.

With a new focus, Zoom planning meetings continued and the two outside vendors utilized last year were hired again to ensure the success of the day's events. Data on the Spot (DOTS) software enabled the voting process necessary for the elections. The company's preparatory work before convention, and its staff's virtual presence on the day itself enabled votes to be cast remotely, counted securely, and reported virtually.

Electro Sounds System brought in and set up the audiovisual equipment needed for the proceedings to be conducted simultaneously via Zoom and livestream. The St. Albans Center (SAC) hall took on the appearance of a network news studio to permit a master control center and enable the limited number of participants who would need to be on-site to sit socially distanced and view screens showing what would be seen by all remote participants and viewers.

In the ten days leading up to convention, five preparatory Zoom sessions for delegates/alternates and clergy enabled convention to run smoothly. There were two budget presentations prior to convention. These presentations by the canon for finance and administration, Judi Gregory and treasurer, Frank Daniels enabled people to be informed of the development of the Diocesan Council's budget, with opportunities for questions to be answered and details provided.

The Rt. Rev. Kevin S. Brown, Bishop of Delaware, facilitated an orientation session for both new and returning delegates to familiarize them with the necessary procedures required for the virtual convention.

Finally, DOTS staff; the election chairperson, Nancy Koenig; and convention manager, Toni Snow facilitated two sessions devoted to election training for delegates so they would be able to vote securely during convention.

In the days leading up to convention, the convention team, which had met faithfully for many weeks to organize and prepare for it, convened virtually for a final review of a detailed eight-page agenda and a four-page production board setting out every audio-visual step. This was followed on the day before convention by an on-site full run-through/technical rehearsal for everyone involved. There were several technical glitches that were resolved in this dress rehearsal, and that is what rehearsals are for.

There's a theater expression that a bad dress rehearsal means a good opening night and that's what everyone hoped for as convention day dawned and everyone needed on-site took to their posts.

- Assistant Secretary of Convention (ASOC), Joseph Davison, staffed the convention help desk and hotline in the SAC reception office.
- Nancy Koenig and Toni Snow established their elections team headquarters in the SAC conference room, enabled by DOTS staff, Brandon, Jamie, and Chris.
- Kathleen Moore, executive assistant to the bishop, had screens and a workstation at one end of SAC's hall, as did Pam Smith, administrative assistant. They ensured all participants had what they needed, tracked Chat questions and raised Zoom hands, and resolved other issues as they arose.
- In a different part of the hall, Cynde Bimbi was seated at a master control board with Tom, Mike, and Eric from Electro Sound Systems;
- And finally, Kay Keenan, Secretary of Convention (SOC), Christ Church Christina Hundred, Wilmington, strikingly elegant in red, and Bishop Brown, resplendent in purple, were set up at the far end of the hall.

All other convention participants were located remotely, and the delegates and clergy signed in early to establish a quorum. Finally, the countdown was over – it was time for everyone to put into practice all that had been planned, and for convention to begin.

What a great beginning to convention! A lively video produced by Cynde Bimbi, director of communications, featured children's answers to the question, "Where Does God Live?" illustrated by photographs and images provided by many diocesan parishes; and the bishop invited everyone to shine their light in the world. You may view this introductory video [here](#).

Bishop Brown, as Chair, called the 237th Annual Convention to order and welcomed all who were gathered in person and remotely. He then appointed Archdeacon Patricia (Pat) Malcolm, Christ Church, Dover, as chaplain to the convention, and recognized her to open convention in prayer:

*The Lord is here, the spirit is with us
We need not fear, the spirit is with us
We abide in peace, the spirit is with us*

*We move forward in hope, the spirit is with us
We rejoice in faith, the spirit is with us.*

Malcolm advised convention that members of Daughters of the King from Christ Church, Dover, and St. Peter's Lewes, were running a virtual prayer room throughout convention and prayer requests could be sent to a designated email address.

The Chair then recognized Kay Keenan (SOC) who presented the agenda to convention for approval. A motion, a second, and a Zoom voice vote approved the agenda. Brown then reminded participants of some Zoom essentials; to keep themselves on mute unless speaking, to symbolically raise a hand for questions, and to use the chat feature if needed. He also announced the telephone help line for anyone to use if necessary. He said, "It's like a PBS telethon – people are standing by to take your call." He reminded all participants to refer to the Convention Guidebook (CGB) throughout convention, as it contained all required information.

One of the minor technical glitches of the day occurred and the bishop asked all attendees to log off, wait 30 seconds, and then log on again, in order to accommodate all participants. Throughout the day, the bishop exhibited patience with the sometimes lengthy process, and humor over the minor hitches that occurred.

Bishop Brown then recognized the convention platform: in addition to Keenan, the chancellor, Tim Willard, St. Peter's, Lewes; the parliamentarian, Kathryn Jakabcin, Trinity parish and Old Swedes, Wilmington; and recording secretary, Connie Cooper, St. Thomas's parish, Newark. He then called attention to appointments requiring confirmation by convention, as found in the Convention Guidebook [page 6](#). He also noted new additions to the Commission on Ministry, Peggy Boyd, St. Luke's, Seaford; Valeri Brunson, St. James' Mill Creek, Wilmington; and the Rev. Jeffrey Ross, rector, St. Peter's, Lewes, chair. These appointments were approved by motion, second, and Zoom voice vote.

Additionally, the bishop's appointments not requiring confirmation were pointed out to attendees, as in the CGB, [page 7](#). He recognized all convention staff, CBG [page 2](#), and recognized and welcomed delegates and alternates, CGB [pages 8-11](#).

The SOC made a motion to grant seat and voice to clergy who serve in the Episcopal Church in Delaware and who are not canonically resident, the Rev. Thomas (Tom) Maynard White, rector, St. John the Baptist, Milton. This was seconded and approved by a Zoom voice vote.

The Chair recognized non-voting members of convention (Chancellor, Standing Committee, Trustees, Diocesan Council, Constitution & Canons, Commission on Ministry, and Registrar) giving them seat and voice. He then recognized the

parliamentarian who announced that all congregations had met the audit requirements per canon 14 and thus their lay delegates were eligible for voice and vote at this annual convention.

The bishop briefly addressed convention by rejoicing in the opening video and the theology of our children. He mentioned the beautiful Icthus created by Tina Edgar, St. Martha's, Bethany Beach, which captured the rich symbolism of Christian iconography. He announced that the Icthus, would be presented at next year's convention and sincerely thanked Edgar for her great gift.

He acknowledged what a challenging year this has been and commended all churches for doing so well and for still being warm and inviting. He noted that the church has not been idle as can be seen in the ministry reports, found in the CGB [pages 38-81](#), which he urged everyone to read. Brown said it is easy to get tired, and he encouraged us all to stay at it – it is good work. He wished we could all be in the same room but asked us to be patient, to listen and look for the Holy Spirit, and to shine our light in the world as the video inspired us.

The resolution process was explained. There were two resolutions before convention: 236.02 Revisions to diocesan Canon 19 (Ecclesiastical Discipline) Second Reading (not to change, final vote) CGB [page 25](#), and 237.01 Endorsing Resolutions Proposed by the Union of Black Episcopalians for Adoption by the 80th General Convention as amended by committee CGB [page 26](#). There being no late resolutions from the floor, the SOC assigned the resolutions to a subsequent open hearing.

Ministry presentations began with a presentation by Clay Brown, Candidate for Holy Orders, Christ Church Christiana Hundred, Wilmington and the Rev. Ted Olson St. Peter's, Lewes. They spoke of the setting up of the commission, its work so far and its goals for the future and referred us to the detailed information available on the diocesan website [here](#).

For the report of Nominating Committee, the bishop recognized John Michael Sophos, chair, St. Peter's, Lewes, who spoke of the challenges faced this year when many, uncertain of the future, were reluctant to commit. He thanked all who had agreed to stand, and introduced the candidates, CGB [pages 13-23](#). There being no nominations from the floor, the voting system, made possible by DOTS was reviewed by Nancy Koenig, elections chair. Elections then proceeded, with some minor technical glitches, and the results may be seen [here](#).

The next ministry presentation was of the new Wardens Network. Its chair, Bruce Vrana, St. James' Mill Creek, Wilmington, made a PowerPoint presentation which may be seen [here](#).

This was followed by the presentation of the ministry reports by the SOC who made the motion that they be accepted by convention. This was seconded and approved by a Zoom voice vote.

One of the most powerful moments of this convention then occurred. The bishop announced that the Church of the Nativity, New Castle, has made the decision to close. The Rev. Margi Pumphrey, resource priest, and Donna Cain, senior warden, gave a moving presentation. Pumphrey said, the Church of the Nativity will be ending its life as a parish on January 16 of next year after 70 years of ministry. "We've had a good life, and we are dying a good death", she said. She went on to tell the history of the church, created from a barn, hence the fittingness of its Nativity name. She continued, "Five years ago we did a life-cycle review, first as a vestry and then as a whole congregation. It was clear that we had to make hard choices. After much deliberation, discernment, and prayer, we decided the best option for us was to continue on as a congregation knowing that we were facing continued decline and death. We set markers – markers for financial status, average Sunday attendance, and ability to properly maintain the property. The vestry reviewed the markers at set intervals and meanwhile the congregation was free to focus on our life together, placing emphasis on a few things done well: keeping faith, keeping fellowship and keeping service – living life to the fullest. And that we have done now for almost five years."

Cain took up the presentation, "This past summer, our average Sunday attendance fell below the mark. It was time to begin planning for legacy, celebration, and leave-taking. This time has been difficult. There is loss and sadness. Yet there is acceptance and even some anticipation and curiosity of what is to come as we have designated one Sunday a month as 'visiting Sunday' so members have had a chance to visit sister churches in the diocese." She celebrated the church's 70 years of being a good neighbor, and the legacy it will leave, "beautiful, well-loved and cared for appointments, some of which were gifted to Nativity at its formation, many acquired as memorial gifts, and some even passed on to us when the Cathedral closed. All holy gifts, blessed by their use, will now be passed on for another church to enjoy." She thanked the faithful regular supply clergy, especially Margie and John Pumphrey, Lloyd Casson and Nancy Calhoun, along with the many others who have stepped in now and then and whom we have so enjoyed serving alongside.

Poignantly, Pumphrey concluded: "And we thank God for the nurture and nourishment and the beautiful worship space where we have lifted our voices in song, prayer and praise, shared holy food and drink, baptized, confirmed, married, and buried, and just plain enjoyed each other's company. We thank God for the assurance that new life awaits. And so we continue to make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!" All were moved by these heartfelt testimonies of faith. The bishop said that character is determined in how we act in adversity and called the Church of the Nativity a beacon for us all. He asked people in all the other diocesan churches to reach out to Nativity, to offer support, to invite people to join them, to let them know they are heard, loved, and honored, and to show love and openness to these brothers and sisters.

Convention moved on to consider a new focus within the diocese. The Rev. Ruth Beresford, Christ Church Christiana Hundred, Wilmington made a presentation on the Commission on Liturgy. Its primary tasks are to support clergy, musicians, altar guilds, sacristans, vergers, acolytes, lectors, and strengthen ministry collaboration; serve as a resource to congregations; and support diocesan liturgies in partnership with the liturgical officer. The commission is seeking two more lay members and the full presentation may be seen [here](#).

The convention then extended its sincere appreciation and deepest gratitude to Anne C. Foster, Esq. who faithfully served this diocese as vice chancellor beginning in 1997 and chancellor since from 2000-2020 and Tempe Steen Esq. who served as vice chancellor from 1999-2020. The bishop, trustees, and convention of ECD offered heartfelt gratitude to Anne and Tempe, and offered its blessing upon them.

On a cheerful and seasonal note, the bishop announced the winner of this year's Christmas card contest, Keziah Soto, age 15, of the Episcopal Church of Saints Andrew and Matthew, Wilmington. He thanked Keziah for the beautiful card which so well expressed the card's scripture.

At the end of Business Session I, the SOC requested voters to log off the voting platform, and to log back in at 12:00 p.m. to re-establish a quorum. The Chair recognized the chaplain who closed the session with prayer.

The break allowed all participants a welcome opportunity to leave their computer screens for a time and Business Session II was called to order at 12:15 p.m. A quorum was re-established, and the chaplain opened the session with prayer. After a reminder of Zoom protocols, the budget was presented to convention by the treasurer of Diocesan Council, Frank Daniels, St. Paul's, Camden.

Despite there having been two prior sessions for people to raise budget questions, several questions were raised during convention. After lengthy discussion and explanations, a motion was made and then seconded and approved by Zoom voice vote.

Further presentations followed:

The Youth Ministry presentation was made by Cana Hartman, St. Thomas's Parish, Newark, and Jessica Potter, St. Peter's, Lewes, and may be seen [here](#).

Helen Spence, chair, St. Thomas's Parish, Newark, made the Stewardship Ministry presentation, which may be seen [here](#).

The Invite, Welcome, Connect presentation was made by Jon Barrett, Immanuel Church, New Castle, which may be seen [here](#).

The bishop recognized, with thanks, diocesan staff, all of whom may be seen in the CGB [page 37](#).

Convention turned its attention to the resolutions and, with no late resolutions from the floor, the SOC presented Resolution 236.02 Revisions to Diocesan Canon 19, Subsection 2.02 and 2.03 of Section 2, CGB [page 25](#). The elections chair called for an online vote, through DOTS, and the resolution was adopted.

The chair recognized the Rev. Patty Downing, rector, Trinity Parish, Wilmington, to present Resolution 237.01 Endorsing Resolutions Proposed by the Union of Black Episcopalians for Adoption by the 80th General Convention as amended by committee, CGB page 26. The Rev. Canon Lloyd Casson proposed amendments to the resolution and a lengthy and lively discussion followed, finally resulting in an electronic vote by which convention accepted the amended resolution. A one-word amendment to the revised resolution was then proposed, seconded, and adopted by vote. You may see the two resolutions that were adopted [here](#).

After a brief break, presentations continued and Walt LaFontaine, executive director of Camp Arrowhead, made a visually impressive presentation about Camp Arrowhead acknowledging its successful summer despite a challenging time during pandemic, and the excellent progress of the exciting new construction and the capital campaign. You may see the presentation [here](#).

The Rev. Dr. Marta Illueca, assistant rector, Brandywine Collaborative Ministries (BCM), then gave a presentation on the progress of the remarkable Pain and Prayer Project, which may be seen [here](#).

In recognition of clergy, the bishop welcomed to the Episcopal Church in Delaware the transfers of the Rev. Kenneth Katona, Diocese of Northern California, St. Barnabas', Wilmington; the Rev. Victoria (Ria) Pretti, Diocese of New Jersey, St. Martha's, Bethany Beach; and the Rev. Ruben (Ben) Rockwell, III, Diocese of Central Gulf Coast, St. James' Mill Creek, Wilmington. In addition, he announced that as of November 1, the Rev. Kim Capwell is the interim rector, BCM. He also recognized that the Rev. David Andrews will be retiring at the end of December. He announced a candidate for Holy Orders, Kevin "Clay" Brown, Christ Church Christiana Hundred, Wilmington, and acknowledged two clergy transferring out of the diocese: The Rev. Dr. Ketlen Solak, Bishop, Diocese of Pittsburgh as its bishop, and the Rev. Maryann Younger to Diocese of North Carolina. He offered a special recognition of the Rev. Deacon Liz Preysner, associate chaplain and English teacher St. Andrew's School, Middletown. Her ordination to the priesthood will take place at the school in January on behalf of the Diocese of New Hampshire. It will be a joyful occasion for the school and its students.

Each year at our annual convention we acknowledge the lives of those who have died in the previous year. In another deeply moving moment of convention, the chaplain offered the following reflection as she read the names of those who have departed:

A Litany of Remembrance – We Remember Them
by Rabbi Sylvan Kamens and Rabbi Jack Riemer

*In the rising of the sun and in its going down,
we remember them.
In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,
we remember them.
In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring,
we remember them.
In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of summer,
we remember them.
In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn,
we remember them.
In the beginning of the year and when it ends.
we remember them.
So long as we live, they too shall live, for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.*

Before commissioning the newly elected, the chair offered thanks and appreciation to the nominees not elected and asked them to listen to the Holy Spirit to see where they will be called next. He then commissioned the newly elected by saying:

May the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen you, that in your ministry as an elected diocesan leader, and in all that you do, you may do God's will in the service of the Kingdom of his Christ. Amen.

Almighty God, look with favor upon these persons who have made a commitment as elected leaders and have renewed their commitment to follow Christ and to serve in his name. Give them courage, patience, and vision, and strengthen us all in our Christian vocation of witness to the world, and of service to others; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the Name of the Episcopal Church in Delaware, I commend you to this work, and pledge to you our prayers, encouragement, and support.

The Chair went on to recognize those who have completed their terms:

Constitution & Canons

Felice Jo Lamden, Immanuel Church, New Castle

Diocesan Council

The Rev. Marianne S. Ell, St. Luke's Church, Seaford

The Rev. Marta Illueca, BCM, Wilmington

Kay Keenan, Lay-at-Large, VP, Christ Church CH, Wilmington

Jim Pappas, Lay-at-Large, Christ Church, Dover

John Michael Sophos, Lay Area I, St. Peter's Church, Lewes

Michael Wood, Lay-at-Large, St. David's Church, Wilmington

Standing Committee

The Rev. Donna Jean Kiessling, St. Peter's Church, Smyrna

Catherine Maguire, Calvary Church, Hillcrest

Trustees

Richard Harra, Treasurer St. David's Church, Wilmington

As Harra was re-elected, the bishop thanked him for his previous six years of service.

In closing the 237th convention, the SOC read some courtesy resolutions, especially one in acknowledgment of the Rev. Dr. Ketlen Solak, the new Bishop of Pittsburgh, whose work in our diocese was appreciated. She will be much missed.

The SOC also announced that Diocesan Council has set the date for the 238th Annual Convention for Friday and Saturday, November 18 and 19, 2022. The bishop asked everyone to mark their calendars now. She announced a vote regarding the location of 238th convention and made a motion that convention accepts the recommendation of the Bishop and the SOC, that the 238th convention be held at the Jane Clifton Ashford Conference Center at Camp Arrowhead. This was enthusiastically seconded and approved by a Zoom voice vote.

In closing the convention, the separate link for the convention Eucharist was announced and with a closing prayer from the chaplain, the business of the convention was closed.

At this point, the bishop and other north Wilmington-based attendees made their way to St. David's Church, Wilmington for the convention service. St. David's was ready to welcome them and 53 people, all masked, were in the congregation. The simple stone east wall of the church provided a stunning backdrop to the service and voices joined in song as the bishop, the Rev. Brad Hinton, Rev. Deacon Bruce Richards, Archdeacon Pat Malcolm, and the Rev. Canon Martha Kirkpatrick entered in procession. With musicians, singers, and readers from several diocesan churches, the service created by the diocesan liturgical officer, the Rev. James M. Bimbi, was joyful and uplifting. It may be seen here.

With this convention behind us, and with 2021 nearing its end, we look forward to a new year and another convention, venturing into an unknown future, assured that

nothing will separate us from the love of God, and, as the bishop asked of us, shining our light in the world.