

United Episcopal Church *of North America*

▪ Missionary Diocese of the South and Ozarks ▪

Bishop's Report – 2022 Convocation **The Rt. Rev. Daniel J. Sparks**

Upon my election as your bishop at last year's convocation, I began undertaking some work in the diocese under the guidance of the presiding bishop, Bishop Peter Robinson. This included identifying people to serve on the Council of Advice and as Examining Chaplains. I began regularly calling clergy, sending monthly email updates to clergy, and developed a diocesan website.

Last October, I relocated from Columbia, Missouri to Birmingham, Alabama. As many of you may know, I made this move so I could be closer to my father, who turned 80 in June. I am grateful I have been able to spend more time with him and other family members. Having lived in Birmingham before, some things are familiar, but I am still getting used to the changes that come with a metropolitan area of 1.1 million people over 15 years.

Along the trip from Missouri to Alabama, I made a detour to visit our retired bishop, Glen Hartley, in Ava, Missouri. We spent a few hours together talking about St. Francis Anglican Church and the diocese.

In December, I visited St. Barnabas Anglican Church in Heber Springs, Arkansas. I had a wonderful visit with Tom Bradshaw, rector of St. Barnabas, and his wife Donna. I also met with Lay Reader George Leever and his wife Barbara. We discussed the future of St. Barnabas and the pastor's health. With Tom and George's input and Bishop Robinson's approval, I organized a rotation of clergy to visit St. Barnabas once each month. Unfortunately, due to various scheduling difficulties, a minister was not able to be there every month, but several of our clergymen visited, and the people in Heber Springs have expressed their gratitude.

Also in December, I enjoyed dinner with Rodney Jackson, rector of All Saints Anglican Church, where we are today, and his wife Pam. In February, I visited Christ Chapel in Fairdealing, Kentucky, at the invitation of the rector, Tom Hiter. I preached there and enjoyed time with Tom and the congregation.

On Saturday, March 26th, I was consecrated bishop at Sts. Andrew and Mathias Anglican Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Paul Slish was also consecrated as the Assistant Bishop for the Diocese of the Great Lakes. Though the timing and the location made it difficult for folks from our diocese to attend, I am grateful that both clergy and lay representatives from the diocese were present.

In March, I reappointed the dean, Jim McTaggart, and I appointed Examining Chaplains. In May, I appointed members of the Council of Advice. I must note that, when I appointed the

Council, I was not aware of the existence of diocesan canons that provide for the election of those members. Absent such knowledge, I acted in accord with the UEC Canons, which are ambiguous as to the selection of Council members. Now that we have rediscovered the diocesan canons, we need to comply, and more will be said about that later.

In April, I enjoyed a short but wonderful visit with the Rev. Jerry Ellington in Rogers, Arkansas. That same weekend, I ordained Tony Cirilla as a deacon in a service at St. Joseph Anglican Church in Branson, Missouri. Tony is the first person I ordained in my ministry as bishop. The following day, I made my first episcopal visit, also at St. Joseph, where I confirmed one.

In May, I made an episcopal visit to All Saints, followed in June by an episcopal visit to St. Stephen's Anglican Church in Fort Payne, Alabama. In early July, I enjoyed another visit with Tom and Donna Bradshaw in Arkansas. The following day, I made an episcopal visit to St. Barnabas, where I baptized the great-granddaughter of the lay reader. During that service, I also announced the retirement of Tom Bradshaw, and he was named Rector Emeritus of the parish. In August, I made an episcopal visit to St. Francis in Ava. During that visit, Bishop Hartley handed off to me some diocesan records, which have been helpful for expanding my knowledge of our diocesan history.

In May, the Rev. Keith Bernarducci and St. Michael Anglican Church in Milton, Florida transferred to the Anglican Catholic Church's Diocese of New Orleans. In July, I received the Rev. Bill Adams into the diocese from the Anglican Orthodox Church's Diocese of the Midwest. In August, I received the Rev. Lawrence Jones and his wife Deaconess Nancy Jones into the diocese from the Reformed Episcopal Church's Diocese of Mid-America. Also last month, the Rt. Rev. Presly Hutchens was received into the diocese. He is the retired bishop of the Anglican Catholic Church's Diocese of New Orleans.

In addition to the ministry to our diocesan congregations, I preached at the Church of the Living God in Moulton, Alabama. I celebrated Holy Communion at St. Matthew's Anglican Church in Birmingham. I also led two services of Holy Communion at St. Michael's Anglican Church in Andalusia, Alabama. I preached at Grace Church in Birmingham. The latter two churches are without pastors and called upon my support as they discern the way ahead.

I have also engaged in furthering my own ministerial development. I audited the Latimer Theological Institute course in Anglican polity, taught by Bishop Robinson. Four weeks ago, I began a Doctor of Ministry program, with a concentration in Ministry Leadership. This program, while demanding, will help me in assessing and guiding the ministry of our diocese. I ask for your prayers in this endeavor, which will take two to three years to complete. I may also call upon your support in carrying out some of the practical projects required for the program, but I can assure you those projects will benefit the work of our diocese.

As you know, I work full-time as a chaplain at the VA medical center in Birmingham. I have been with the VA for about five years now. This ministry is both rewarding and challenging, as you can imagine. I appreciate your prayers as I carry on this work. On average, I make about 5,000 pastoral visits per year with patients, family members, and staff. There is no shortage of need for pastoral care and support.

In February, I made a trip to Brevard, North Carolina for a week-long chaplain conference. This was required by the Associated Gospel Churches, which was the ecclesiastical endorsing agency for my work as a federal chaplain. The AGC has been very gracious to pick up my endorsement during a time when the UEC was unable to provide this support. However, recently, the Rev. John Brantley, from the Missionary Diocese of the East, has been named the VA endorser, and I am again endorsed by the UEC. Our own Rev. Tom Hiter has also been made the UEC endorser for the military.

I have also been building connections with other Anglicans and evangelicals. In March, I participated in a virtual seminar on evangelism, which was hosted by the Anglican Connection. The presentation was about the "Word 121" tool, and I commend this to you as helpful for one-to-one evangelism with people you already know. In April, I attended an alumni cookout at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham. It was nice to reconnect with some of my old professors. The staff there has been gracious to offer to help me connect with seminary students. I will continue to develop relationships there, and I hope we may attract some church planters from among those students.

In June, I attended a conference hosted by the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC). This is an inter-denominational gathering of Anglican evangelicals. Though we have important differences in our denominational allegiances, the Anglicans present at that conference share a great deal in our doctrinal affirmations. It was a tremendously encouraging opportunity to fellowship with ministers and laymen who are committed to the biblical gospel.

In the months that remain this year, I will be continuing some of the diocesan work that I will detail to you in later sessions at this convocation. I'll also attend another event at Beeson Divinity School and travel to Atlanta for a conference of the Reformation Fellowship.

I am seeking for our diocese to grow strong, to shore up the good things about us, to mature in our faith and ministry. Some of this comes through the building and strengthening of our relationships with our sister churches in the diocese. Some of this comes from careful, respectful, and warm relationships with those outside the UEC, with whom we have essentials in common. I will share more on those topics in some of our other sessions.

In summarizing my ministry over the past year—initially as your bishop-elect, and then as your bishop:

- I have made in-person visits with clergy, in addition to regular phone calls and emails;
- I have visited our six congregations;
- I ordained one, confirmed one, and baptized one;
- I have been firming up our diocesan organization and collaborating with the other bishops of the UEC;
- I have traveled 6,738 miles for episcopal ministry in our diocese;
- I have traveled 886 miles for my ministry as a chaplain;
- And I have traveled 1,501 miles for other ministry for the benefit of relationships with fellow Anglicans and other believers;
- If you're keeping up with the numbers, that is 9,125 total miles traveled for ministry over the past year.

Please pray for my safe travel as I continue in the year ahead. I will try to reduce travel through the end of the year so I can spend a little more time with family, work on my doctoral studies, and perform the day-to-day work of supporting our diocese. I ask for your continued prayers for wisdom and humility.

Note that I have no staff, no salary, and no funds. Thank you for your patience as I learn the practical aspects of diocesan administration and as I exhort you in faithfulness to the Lord. There is much work to be done. I pledge to continue. I pray for your success in the Lord, and I look forward to continuing in the fields of harvest with you.

This concludes my report.