

United Episcopal Church *of North America*

▪ Missionary Diocese of the South and Ozarks ▪

Bishop's Report – 2023 Convocation **The Rt. Rev. Daniel J. Sparks**

Since last year's convocation, my continued focus has been on supporting the good health and stability of our diocese. This work comes in many forms, as noted in the following details. It is essential that we are faithful to the Lord's calling and that we do not look to numbers and busy-work as measures of success.

Congregations

Last fall, the UEC House of Bishops decided to collapse the Missionary Diocese of the West and united those clergy and congregations into this diocese, effective January 1, 2023.

Note that the area formerly part of the Missionary Diocese of the West is now known as the Western Archdeaconry. Bishop Steven Murrell serves as episcopal archdeacon for that area. The original portion of our diocese has been named the Central Deanery.

In January, St. Jude's Anglican Church in Tucson, Arizona departed the diocese and affiliated with the Diocese of the Central and Western States, Anglican Province of America.

Episcopal Travel

I made these episcopal visits over the past year:

- January 1, 2023: St. Barnabas Anglican Church, Heber Springs, Arkansas.
- February 19, 2023: St. Bede's Anglican Church, Tucson, Arizona.
- May 21, 2023: St. Joseph Anglican Church, Branson, Missouri.
- June 4, 2023: St. Barnabas in the Pines Anglican Church, Prescott, Arizona.
- June 11, 2023: St. Bede's Anglican Church, Tucson, Arizona.
- August 27, 2023: Christ Chapel, Benton, Kentucky.

The UEC Canons require an episcopal visit to each congregation at least once every three years. Except for one chapel, I have made an episcopal visit to every congregation in the diocese within the past 18 months. I will be working with the two assisting bishops so that we can maintain a pattern of visitation.

Clergy

I ordained the following clergymen:

- February 19, 2023: The Rev. Richard Ball, presbyter. Minister, St. Bede's Anglican Church, Tucson, Arizona.
- May 21, 2023: The Rev. Anthony Cirilla, presbyter. Assisting minister, St. Joseph Anglican Church, Branson, Missouri.
- June 11, 2023: The Rev. Clarence Novess, III, presbyter. Rector, All Saints Anglican Church (independent), Green Valley, Arizona.

I received this clergyman into the diocese:

- February 3, 2023: The Rev. Matthew Joyner, from the Diocese of the Central States, Reformed Episcopal Church.

I provided letters dimissory to these clergymen:

- January 26, 2023: The Rev. David Milam, to the Diocese of the Central and Western States, Anglican Province of America.
- April 21, 2023: The Rev. Matthew Joyner, to the Diocese of All Nations, Anglican Church in North America.
- June 20, 2023: The Rev. Ronald Murray, to the Diocese of the Central and Western States, Anglican Province of America.

I have enjoyed individual pastoral care visits with three clergymen. In addition to the interactions at episcopal visits and meetings, it is very important that I provide support to our ministers and their families.

Earlier this year, I became aware of the Rev. Webster in Pensacola. He is a retired UEC presbyter who is in poor health and resides in a nursing home. Bishop Presley Hutchens knows him and the Webster family. Bishop Hutchens has been helpful in reaching out to the family and the remnant of the former UEC congregation in Pensacola.

Lay Ministry

I licensed these Lay Readers:

- Tom Bauer, St. Joseph Anglican Church, Branson, Missouri.
- Howard Bugden, St. Bede's Anglican Church, Tucson, Arizona.
- Joe Criswell, St. Francis Anglican Church, Ava, Missouri.
- Don Holland, St. Joseph Anglican Church, Branson, Missouri.
- Tom Saunders, St. Bede's Anglican Church, Tucson, Arizona.
- John Simmons, St. Francis Anglican Church, Ava, Missouri.
- Bill Winkelmann, St. Francis Anglican Church, Ava, Missouri.

Deaconess Nancy Jones and I have collaborated on guidelines for the training and ministry of deaconesses in the diocese. There is more work to be done, and I am grateful for Nancy's wisdom and experience in this area.

Committees and Boards

Following last year's Convocation, the Standing Committee met several times, including some extra meetings to get diocesan administrative matters on track. I am grateful for the work the members have done. They have made my life easier as a bishop. Per our canons, I serve as an *ex officio* member of all diocesan committees and boards.

In February, I joined the Examining Chaplains for an organizational meeting. We discussed the role of the chaplains and the process of preparing men for ordination.

Given the breadth of matters related to clergy formation and development, I have formed an advisory group to assist me in evaluating needs and sharing ideas. Areas to be addressed include structuring the postulancy program, educational needs, streamlining the paperwork process, and evaluating the process for receiving clergy from other jurisdictions. This work is important because we have both an immediate and long-term need for godly, qualified, and competent men to serve in pastoral ministry throughout our diocese.

Last November, I attended a UEC House of Bishops meeting in Waynesboro, Virginia. I participated in a virtual bishops' meeting in February. I anticipate these will occur more routinely in the coming year. In August, I was elected to fill an episcopal vacancy on the UEC National Council.

Communications

Each month, I send updates to diocesan clergy. I also maintain the diocesan website. These tools help us keep in touch and publicize the work of the diocese.

At last year's Convocation, clergy requested that we have regular clergy meetings. We now have a virtual conference call every two months, during which we share parish news, discuss ministry ideas, pray, and enjoy fellowship.

Catholic Relations

In addition to diocesan ministry, I led two Sunday services and celebrated communion several times at St. Matthew's Anglican Church (independent) in Birmingham, where I

regularly attend. I also led a service of Holy Communion at St. Michael's Anglican Church in Andalusia, Alabama.

I have continued to network with fellow believers for mutual edification and to seek out potential ministers. This included attending two alumni events with Beeson Divinity School. Inquiries and friendly correspondence come from all quarters.

Personal Development

Due to the demands of bivocational episcopal ministry, it was necessary that I withdraw from the Doctor of Ministry program in January. I do not foresee being able to resume studies anytime soon.

I had the pleasure of attending a lecture by Dr. Ashley Null on "Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation," which was held at Beeson Divinity School. I also audited an online course on *The Book of Common Prayer* from Davenant Hall.

As a confirmed bachelor who will reach his 48th birthday in a few days, I am delighted to tell you that I will be married in October. The Lord has provided an overwhelming and surprising blessing that gives me great joy. My fiancée is a virtuous, gracious, and lovely lady whose care and support will enrich my ministry. Please pray that we will be true representatives of Christ's love for his church.

Summary

As I noted last year, I am seeking for our diocese to grow strong, to shore up the good, and to mature in our faith and ministry. The work of the Standing Committee this year has helped solidify some of our organizational footing. I have been encouraged with the many signs of spiritual growth observed among our clergy and congregations. May the Lord guide us ever deeper in his service!

In summarizing my ministry over the past year:

- I have made in-person visits with clergy, in addition to regular phone calls, emails, and Zoom conference calls.
- I have visited five of our congregations.
- I ordained three presbyters.
- I have been firming up our diocesan organization and collaborating with the other bishops of the UEC.
- I have traveled 4,867 miles for episcopal ministry in our diocese and 1,628 miles for other ministry—for a total of 6,495 miles in the past year.

Again, I ask for your prayers for wisdom, humility, and safe travel.

Keep up the Lord's work, for his glory!

Let us, with a gladsome mind,
praise the Lord, for he is kind:
for his mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

This concludes my report.