



The Diocese of Southern Ohio

Episcopalians in connection

March 22, 2021
Commemoration of James De Koven

Dear friends in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It has been a few weeks since our last update to the diocese, so we wanted to fill you in on several important areas.

Survey

Thank you for your participation in the diocesan-wide survey. This was important as we sought to evaluate whether our diocese is ready to proceed with a bishop search now, or if we have work to do before that time. We are just about finished digesting the results of the survey, and we expect to make a full report later this week.

There was some confusion about the purpose of the survey. The primary reason for the survey is to help us understand our diocese's health. To get a benchmark of comparison with other dioceses, we engaged with Holy Cow! Consulting to run the survey and report to the Standing Committee. They have worked with dozens of dioceses and other denominational regions in recent years. The survey was generalized to allow comparison with that wider group.

The secondary reason for the survey was to get some basic data to our bishop search committee, when that group is appointed in due course. The search committee will use findings from this survey, along with many other kinds of information, to determine the characteristics we need in our next bishop and to describe our diocese to potential nominees for our next bishop.

Listening sessions

We are organizing listening sessions to be held in April and May. The purpose of these sessions is for the Standing Committee to hear from the people of the diocese about our current health, our concerns, and our hopes. These will be held over Zoom, and we expect to have some general sessions for anyone in the diocese to attend and some role-specific sessions, for example for clergy. Stay tuned for details.

Leadership

There have been ongoing questions about leadership at this moment of transition. We understand that this is a challenging time, so it makes sense there would be questions or concerns.

In the absence of a diocesan bishop, the Standing Committee becomes the Ecclesiastical Authority. The Standing Committee then has the option of retaining this authority during a time of transition or of calling for the election of a Provisional Bishop (the bishop equivalent of an interim rector) who holds the Ecclesiastical Authority until a new diocesan bishop is elected and ordained.

As we said last winter, we have elected to retain the role of Ecclesiastical Authority for a time as we evaluate the needs of our diocese. We signed a six-month contract with Bishop Ken Price, and he became the “Bishop in Southern Ohio” on December 1. In this capacity he is serving as an assisting bishop, serving at the direction of the Standing Committee.

We have delegated a number of matters to Bishop Price, and we trust his leadership in these areas. He is handling worship and liturgy decisions, the ordination process, clergy discipline matters, and pastoral care of clergy, among other issues. On these matters if you have a concern or question, please contact him directly.

Canon John Johanssen continues to serve as canon to the ordinary, reporting to Bishop Price, and leading the diocesan staff. We are grateful to Bishop Price and Canon Johanssen for their work.

Next steps for our diocese

As we digest the results of the survey and listening sessions, we are nearing the point when we will be ready to chart the course of our diocese leading to the search, election, and ordination of our next diocesan bishop. We have set a date in May for an all-day Standing Committee retreat to plan a detailed timeline, and we expect to share that plan with the whole diocese once it is complete. This timeline will give some preliminary milestones and dates leading to the election and ordination of our next diocesan bishop.

As part of that work, we will determine the appropriate diocesan leadership for the remainder of our transition time.

We have been working diligently to serve those who elected us as we lead the diocese in this time of pandemic and leadership transition. No doubt we have made mistakes and we will make more mistakes in the future. We are accountable to the whole diocese, and we hope you will let us know if you have concerns or see that we have made a mistake. Please forgive us where we err, and know that we are grateful for your prayer and support.

If you have questions about the matters we have delegated to Bishop Price, please be in touch with him. If you have needs that relate to the diocesan staff, contact the appropriate staff member or Canon Johanssen. If you have questions about the transition process or other matters, please do not hesitate to contact us at standingcommittee@diosohio.org.

Prayer

We invite you to pray for us, for all diocesan leaders, for the diocesan staff, and for the ministries of our whole diocese.

Almighty and everliving God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with those who take counsel for the renewal and mission of your Church. Teach us in all things to seek first your honor and glory. Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.(BCP page 818)

Blessings be with you as we enter the final days of this Lenten season of repentance and renewal.

Yours faithfully,

The Standing Committee

Mr. Larry Hayes, president

The Rev. Philip DeVaul, vice-president

Dr. James Allsop

The Rev. Dr. Ellen Cook

Mr. Barry Feist

The Rev. Canon Scott Gunn