

Highlights of the 226th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Virginia

For the first time in 226 years, the Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia gathered not in person, but online. More than 450 delegates attended the November 14 Convention via Zoom. The Convention was also broadcast simultaneously in Spanish and Korean allowing our Spanish- and Korean-speaking delegates to participate more fully.

Delegates to Convention have several responsibilities including the election of leaders to governing bodies, passing a budget for the upcoming year, and voting on any resolutions that come before the Convention.

Elections to Standing Committee

The following people were elected to the Diocesan Standing Committee, which, among other responsibilities, serves as the council of advice to the Bishop:

Clergy Delegates

The Rev. Laura Minnich Lockey, James Madison University Campus Ministry

The Rev. B. Cayce Ramey, All Saints Sharon Chapel, Alexandria

Lay Delegates

Jessica Atkinson, St. George's, Fredericksburg

Margaret Arnette Woody, St. Thomas, Richmond

Budget

The Convention delegates considered a budget presented by the Executive Board which reflected cuts necessary to balance the budget anticipating receipts of approximately 15% less giving by parishes to the Diocese. The budget featured increased funding for the work of race and reconciliation but also numerous cuts in virtually all other areas due to anticipated reduced giving to the Diocese. Budget amendments were proposed to restore funding for campus ministries to be funded by a hardship waiver of giving to The Episcopal Church. After an extended discussion the Convention declined to approve the budget and thereby referred the budget back to the Executive Board.

Resourcing God's Mission

The Task Force on Resourcing God's Mission in the Diocese of Virginia, led by the Rev. Sven vanBaars, addressed the gap between opportunities and funding of God's mission by naming the patterns of giving in our diocese while comparing those patterns to other dioceses, learning about giving from our congregations, and exploring ways to increase giving. Ultimately the task force sought to determine and implement the practices that will help our diocese better utilize our giving plan to support our shared ministries.

The new giving plan would ask all congregations to commit to a covenant of giving that dedicates 10% of pledge and plate income to the ministry of the Diocese of Virginia. Those congregations that are not giving at this covenantal level would engage in a process of conversation about congregational growth and possibly a waiver. The task force suggests putting forward a resolution at the 227th Annual Convention in November 2021 that would replace the Virginia Plan for Proportional Giving with what we are currently calling the "Virginia Covenantal Giving Plan". A 3-year phase-in period may be needed but we believe that most congregations could easily adopt the giving plan.

Resolutions and Other Actions of Convention

Delegates to Convention passed the following resolutions:

R-1 Updating Rules to Assure Fairness In Virtual Church Governance Meetings

R-1 will create a task force to review diocesan canons, rules of order, and administrative practices and recommend changes as needed to help address issues of equitable access for all people to online church governance meetings. These issues include internet accessibility, cost, digital training, accommodations for hearing impaired, and translation into other languages. The task force will report recommendations to the 227th Annual Convention.

R-2 Stipendiary Clergy Parental Leave Equity

The proposed resolution calls on the Diocese of Virginia to recommend as a guideline that vestries provide parental leave of eight weeks with full compensation for full-time parochial and diocesan clergy and lay employees with full compensation based on their employment status, within one year of the birth or adoption of a child. After several amendments were discussed and the level of complexity requiring further study became evident, the proposed resolution was tabled for further consideration at the next Convention.

R-3 Resolution to Authorize an Election of a Bishop Diocesan

R-3 authorizes the Diocese to commence a process to elect the next Bishop Diocesan. It authorizes the Standing Committee to appoint Search and Transition Committees. The dates for the election and consecration of the next Bishop Diocesan will be set by the Standing Committee in consultation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop. Bishop Goff said in her Pastoral Address that the Diocese anticipates an election and consecration some time in 2022, depending upon the schedule of the Presiding Bishop. Until that time, Bishop Goff will continue to serve as the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese.

Amendments to the Diocesan Constitution and Canons

C-1 The Convention passed c-1 on first reading. C-1 is an amendment to the Constitution to confirm that the official name of the Diocese is the Diocese of Virginia. This constitutes the second reading.

C-2 The Convention passed a canonical amendment to expand the membership of the diocesan Executive Board to include three at-large members (lay or clerical) appointed by the Bishop. The Canons previously provided for geographical diversity on the Executive Board, but there are other important kinds of diversity that have not always been represented, including diversity of race, ethnicity, cultural background, gender, age, parish size, skillsets, professional expertise, and work status. With this option of appointed members, the bishop could draw on the strengths and richness of talent within the Diocese, while also tailoring the appointments to the needs and tasks anticipated for the coming year.

Highlights of Bishop Goff's Pastoral Address

In her pastoral address, the Rt. Rev. Susan Goff, Bishop Suffragan and Ecclesiastical Authority, illuminated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on church life and diocesan ministry this year. "We suspended in-person worship and activities in our church buildings until it is safe for everyone to regather, and we developed guidelines, protocols and processes for protecting each other. Our Regathering Task Force has worked long and hard to provide needed information and support to congregations." The Bishop's office directed all of its energies into providing support and resources to clergy and vestries as they worked to lead congregations through the dual pandemics of COVID and nationwide racial crisis.

"Even as these new priorities demand our focus, we have not abandoned the four priorities we named last year," said Bishop Goff. The four priorities remain: healing across differences; resourcing God's mission, care of God's creation and evangelism.

Bishop Goff said she is working with the new diocesan Ministry for Racial Justice and Healing to articulate a strategy for this work, including hiring a new full-time staff person to coordinate the work of racial justice and healing across the Diocese.

She reported that the Task Force on Resourcing God's Mission has identified a plan to strengthen giving from congregations to the diocesan budget. At the same time, the Diocese is "actively at work to find ways to unrestrict some funds and to sell undeveloped land where we don't anticipate planting a new congregation. These efforts, along with strengthening giving from congregations, will put us in stronger financial health in years to come."

On a personal note, Bishop Goff announced that she is now cancer free. The Bishop was diagnosed with breast cancer in February and underwent surgery, months of chemotherapy and radiation. She said she felt blessed to have been able to work full-time through the course of treatment.

The full video of Bishop Goff's Pastoral Address will be posted on [Facebook](#) in English, Spanish and Korean in the coming week.

The Worship Service

The full worship service from Convention will be re-broadcast on the diocesan [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) pages the following day, Sunday, November 15. The preacher is the Rt. Rev. Phoebe Roaf, Bishop of the Diocese of West Tennessee. Bishop Goff is the Celebrant.