



# The Episcopal Diocese of New York

## 2023 Diocesan Convention Report of the Rt. Rev. Allen K. Shin, Bishop Suffragan November 11, 2023

December last year was a sobering month for me. Two of our faithful deacons, Deacon Terri Jones and Deacon Shiane Lee, died just a couple of weeks apart from each other around Christmas. In the middle of that, a dear old friend of mine, Peter Ng, died rather suddenly. They were all much loved by many in the Diocese and were great loss to the Diocese. Being present and praying with those who are dying is always a holy journey, not because death is holy but because life is holy—the life of all that has been and the life of all that is to come in the risen Christ.

This past summer I had the privilege of walking a holy journey in a different context. St. Andrew's in South Fallsburg held its final Eucharist on June 18<sup>th</sup> and Delaware Catskills Episcopal Ministry its final Eucharist on July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Both services were emotionally moving and very difficult. But new seeds of life have been planted in all four congregations. Rural and Migration Ministry was in an urgent need of a new home, and they began a new life at St. Andrew's this summer. St. John's Monticello began a shared ministry with St. John's Ellenville and the Rev. Meg Stapleton-Smith has been called to serve both congregations. Grace Church in Port Jervis is ready to begin a team ministry with Grace Church Middletown and we are looking for a full-time priest for Port Jervis. St. James Callicoon near the Pennsylvania border will remain open by making their space available to the community at large. It was an incredible privilege for me to walk that holy journey with them. I want to recognize and lift up the people of these four churches for their faithful witness and the courage of faith.

We just welcomed the new parish of All Saints in South Bronx to this convention. St. David's, St. Edmund's and St. Simeon's had been worshipping together for a couple of years under the pastoral leadership of the Rev. Ben Nnaji. It has been a long, hard journey of difficult conversations and deep discernment to get to this point. I am grateful to the leadership of Fr. Ben Nnaji and the vestry leaders of the three congregations for their faithfulness to each other and to this process. It was truly a fruit born of faith, hope and love.

Trinity Church Morrisania in South Bronx was founded in 1868 and the cornerstone of the current building was laid by Bishop Horatio Potter in 1874. Through all the ups and downs over many years, Trinity Church has been an important presence in South Bronx. I am very sad to tell you that faced with insurmountable property issues, the wardens and the vestry have recently

decided to close the parish. Their final Eucharist will be on the morning of December 24<sup>th</sup>. I am deeply, deeply grateful to the vestry leaders and the people of Trinity who have been faithful to the parish and to their mission of serving the people of Morrisania. I would like to thank Fr. Andrew Kadel who has been serving this parish in recent years, Crystal Lake, the current warden of the parish and especially Paula Roberts, a long-time faithful leader and member of Trinity, whose father, the Rev. Wendell Roberts, was one-time rector of this parish. They have expressed a desire for continued legacy of their mission in that neighborhood and for a new Latino ministry in South Bronx. We will do everything we can to honor their legacy and desire.

In the meantime not too far in the north of the Bronx, three churches in New Rochelle—Trinity-St. Paul's, St. John's and St. Simon's, have also been on a journey of collaboration under the leadership of the Rev. Jennie Talley. They are now discerning the consolidation of their three churches for future sustainability and vitality. I want to thank Mother Jennie Talley for her leadership and to the people of these congregations for their faithful and prayerful discernment and their courage of faith. I look forward to receiving them as a new parish to the convention next year.

On Staten Island we saw the closure of St. Simon's and St. Stephen's in the last few years. The eight remaining parishes have recognized the need to collaborate for common mission and ministries. They have called the Rev. Kirstin Swanson who was ordained this fall as the missionary for collaborative ministry. This is not a consolidation but another model of collaboration I want to lift up.

Recently we began a much awaited and needed conversation with the parishes in Harlem region to discern the common mission and collaboration among them. This conversation will help strengthen their common life and mission and chart some new possibilities for the Episcopal Church's presence in Harlem. We have engaged the Rev. Canon Charles Wynder, Jr. as the consultant. He brings a lot of experience of facilitating such conversations with African American congregations in a number of dioceses. They will walk this journey for the next eight months.

Four years ago, we began a church renewal project at St. Peter's Chelsea. The Rev. Christine Lee responded to this call of congregational redevelopment. I am happy to report that she and the lay leaders have led the parish to a new life of growth and vitality. They are still facing many challenges with the property, but they are building the capacity to address and meet those issues. I want to thank Christine Lee and the leaders of St. Peter's for their hard work in this very challenging endeavor.

One of the tragic consequences of COVID was St. Peter's Church in Port Chester. The interim priest, the Rev. Sal Ros, caught COVID and almost died, and the church building was condemned by the fire department. The church has been closed for two years. With the help of Egbert Stolk, our director of property support, and the lawyers, we have been on a long process

of dissolving the parish so that the Diocese can oversee the care and the development of the property for a new life and sustainability. This clearly is a whole new start. The rector of Christ's Church Rye, Mother Kate Malin, and I have had a conversation about collaboration and partnership in this endeavor. It is my hope to call a church planter by next summer. This will be an exciting new church planting project which we have not seen in many years in this Diocese.

According to Canon Nora Smith, we have 178 worshipping congregations, and of these 86 churches have full-time clergy positions, and 20 churches are sharing full-time clergy in some configuration or another. Currently 28 churches are in transition and just 8 of them are full time positions. 20 other churches with clergy vacancy are not in active search. Statistics are not the be all and end all. They do not give a full picture of vitality of any congregation or diocese. But I share all these stories with you, my friends, because they capture the changing landscape of our Diocese, to which we ought to pay attention. Stories like these will be our shared stories for the foreseeable future.

Death and resurrection is the Christian paradigm of life, and at no other time than the present moment is God calling us to live more deeply into this paradigm in our common life. We need to walk this holy journey together as the Diocese. We grieve together and we rise to new life together. So today we give thanks for all that has been and say yes to all that is to come.

One important highlight of the summer was the launching of the College for Congregational Development—one week in June and another in July. Both were maxed out with 40 participants each with a long wait list. Next year we already have 17 people pre-registered for the first cohort and 21 for the second cohort. Canon Conrado and I are exploring a way to launch a weekend commuter series next fall. More will be announced once the details have been worked out.

Children's Christian formation is a vital part of any parish. To help and support that ministry, we have partnered with Story Makers to offer their material at 50% discount for up to 25 children. This is an excellent home-grown program of our Diocese. I hope many of you take advantage of this opportunity.

The summer youth conference had another successful event in August with close to 80 participants. In July for the first time in many years, youth from the Diocese of New York participated in the national Episcopal Youth Event in Maryland. Thanks to the Rev. Kyle Martindale for organizing it and driving the youth to the event. Bishop Heyd and I drove down for a day, and what we saw was an amazingly well-organized event that celebrated the diversity of our youth and their spirit with wonderfully diverse music and with prayer and deep spiritual conversations. We hope to continue to grow our participation in this triennial event.

Young Adult Network of the Diocese has been reenergized by the leadership of the Young Adult Council and the Rev. Megan Sanders. They held retreats with guest speakers, formation and fellowship events and a leadership retreat in August. On a sad note, New York Service and

Justice Collaborative had to be sunset in July due to the lack of candidates for the program. Under the leadership of Judith Douglas, this ministry served young adult participants with important spiritual formation, some of whom went on to discern their calls to ordained ministry. Bishop Heyd has asked the Young Adult Council to explore the possibility of building a young adult spiritual community, based on the core values of prayer, discernment and social service.

The new energy I have seen in the children and youth ministries and the young adult ministry around the diocese gives me hope and reassurance that God is not done with the Church yet. The Holy Spirit is at work and we need to step out of her way and make room for her to give birth to new life to our churches in the Diocese.

Another big highlight was the national gathering of Asian American leaders which our Asian American leaders helped organize and lead in Austin, Texas last April. The guest speaker was the Rev. Kyung Ja Oh, the first Korean American woman priest ordained in The Episcopal Church. Next April it will be held in Portland, OR with Bishop Diana Akiyama. On December 16<sup>th</sup>, they will host Professor Kwok Pui Lan as the guest speaker for an online conversation on her latest book, *The Anglican Tradition from a Postcolonial Perspective*. They have also been busy making preparations for the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the priestly ordination of Li Tim Oi. She was the first woman to be ordained a priest in the entire Anglican Communion. The celebration will be held on May 10<sup>th</sup> next year here at this very Cathedral.

In the spirit of the convention theme, I now would like to say a few words of thanks. To the convention planning committee, thank you for organizing another wonderful convention. Thank you, Bishop Glasspool, for your leadership and for coming up with the theme of this convention which is apt for the present moment of our common life.

To the members of support staff, thank you for all that you do to make our lives less complicated. To the members of the senior staff, thank you for all your hard work and your professionalism. Thank you, Esslie, for all that you have done to reorganize and reorder the financial life of the Diocese. There is much more work to be done but you have gotten us through a rough start.

To the Bishop colleagues, thank you for your collegiality and unwavering friendship. I must say, Bishop Dietsche, how envious I am that you never have to do another convention unless you choose to. I give thanks for all that you and I have been through together. And happy 70<sup>th</sup> birthday!

And Bishop Heyd, what can I tell you? It's been a whirlwind of a journey already. And I still say yes to riding the tide with you of all that is to come. I am sure Bishop Glasspool is of the same mind.

Most importantly, though, I express my deepest gratitude to all the people, both lay and clergy, of our Diocese. It has been an unprecedentedly challenging and anxious time for the church. Yet you and I are put in this place at this very moment for a reason and a purpose. And that is to lead this great Diocese into a new life of God's mission and to bring healing and reconciliation to this broken world. We can do this, and we will do this for with God nothing is impossible.

Lastly, as we remember the veterans and the men and the women in military, let us also pray for the end of the horrific wars in Ukraine and in the Holy Land. Pray for the innocent victims of these wars. I yearn for the day when we learn war no more!

I end with two simple words of Moses spoke in the Book of Deuteronomy: "Choose life." What kind of life do we hope for and envision for the Diocese of New York? What choices are we going to make and what risks are we willing to take for that vision of life? By the grace of God, the agency to choose life is ours together. So let us say Yes to all that is to come.