



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF FLORIDA

REPORT TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE DIOCESE OF FLORIDA ON THE SPRING CONVOCATIONS OF 2024

June 10, 2024

(edited version – for purposes of clarification and grammatical corrections July 23, 2025)

Dear Friends,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! My prayers continue alongside yours as this period of transition, growth and healing continues.

It has been a pleasure to work with the Convocation Steering Committee, chaired by Joe Gibbs, and staffed with excellent, wise, discerning and loving leaders. We became a community that stayed close to grace as we prayed and planned the three convocation events that occurred over the last five months.

To recap, in January we had a gathering of lay and clergy leaders that included 180 participants, and in May we had a clergy gathering of 65 leaders and a final lay and clergy gathering of 120 leaders. Each one lasted about six hours, included both large and small group sharing, Bible study, prayer, food, fellowship and worship - including Eucharist. These events were carefully discerned and planned by the steering committee, who took to heart the need to create a space appropriate to the level of conflict, and which was directed toward a long-term trajectory of reconciliation as a way of living together in the diocese. Advance and clear communication regarding the intention of each gathering was shared with the diocese. Participants could know what to expect and choose if such a face-to-face encounter with members of the wider diocese was appropriate for them at this time. At all events people were respectful, engaged and intentional about the work at hand. I commend the committee for collaboratively designing a process that could be easily learned and engaged, and which offered the opportunity for speaking and listening while being in communion with one another.

The steering committee, who participated in all group sessions of the convocations, reported experiencing a sense of healing and reconciliation on the group level and also between individuals. Between convocation gatherings, we heard reports of some participants having one-on-one encounters with persons where there was significant brokenness in the relationship. These conversations occurred either at a gathering, or a meeting on another occasion. Clearly intention to heal and reconcile has been active on a number of levels. Since healing and reconciliation are not linear in their progression, we cannot know the full impact of these gatherings; however, the 'feel' at each gathering was that progress was being made. We joked after the first convocation (but it was

true) that we considered it a significant ‘win’ that there were no food fights, no one left because of anger, disgust or contempt. People appeared genuinely committed to the process of reconciliation.

It is important to note that the designed process for these gatherings differed from that of parliamentary process typically used at conventions. The processes used at the convocations allowed people to have conversation without the pressures of decision-making and voting. As the diocese continues to work through the areas where it experiences conflict, I would encourage a more diverse design than is typically used in the convention setting. The use of processes designed for intentional listening, and planned well in advance of a convention, could include Bible study in the manner of lectio divina, and the use of mutual invitation for group sharing. This can support a convention’s discernment, while using parliamentary procedure, as prayerful decisions are made on complex matters.

I believe the three convocations have given members of the diocese a confidence-building experience and helped them develop skills for effective listening, conversing and discerning deeply personal and important matters. In my experience if strategic processes are planned and delivered, the parliamentary work is more efficiently, effectively and pleasantly achieved.

Ultimately, the steering committee experienced that we heard ‘a sound of mission in the room’ as people were ‘restored to God and one another’. They dwelt together, listened, shared and contributed to a vision of being a diocese with a high value of reconciliation, shared across a great variety of perspectives. There was, literally, a hum of gentle, patient, honest and disciplined sharing throughout each day. Eucharist was most certainly an experience of being the body of Christ and dwelling in the mystery of salvation. These were days of great beauty as the Spirit guided us in the way of grace.

The Convocation Steering Committee has completed its work to gather the diocese for initial listening and sharing. I would this group as a design team for future gatherings, including convention. This well-functioning committee has developed significant skills in participatory process creation: design skills, patient and tolerant listening across difference, holding the long view of reconciliation, and appropriately challenging but not force a gathering beyond its limits. Importantly, while working very hard on the planning, in the end the committee was able to trust the Spirit in the risky business of gathering a large group of people in conflict in the same room!

Please find attached the raw data of the clergy gathering (May 7) and the last convocation (May 18). They differ in the responses to those heard in the email listening sessions last fall, which contained personal stories of their experience of ‘the diocese’, certain individuals within it, and the various conflicts at play. The questions used in the convocations allowed for personal sharing but also invited people to articulate their experience and share skills they had learned during other reconciliation events in their lives. As well, they were asked to share best practices they believed the diocese needed to engage going forward. The convocations were, therefore, not intended only to ‘vent’ but also to gather positive energy for forward movement.

My observation is that the Diocese of Florida is one of high context culture, that is, it wants to be a connected body of faithful members. This type of group culture finds their identity in one another, often thinking of themselves as a group before thinking of themselves as individuals. Hence, when conflict occurs, it is particularly stressful, since identity is experienced through the group itself rather than the individual. Higher context cultures most appropriately engage group processes of decision-making and conflict resolution because they are methods that both respect and build up the body

throughout the deliberation. Conflict is not seen as a debate or a fight to be won, but an opportunity to live more deeply into community, finding the wisdom that comes through mutual discernment.

In the raw data (see attached for the May convocations - clergy day and clergy/lay day) which represents an abundance of sentiments) there are many statements that came from the small groups that indicated a deep desire to create a positive, faithful and fruitful diocesan culture. The qualities of these comments reflect that they want to be heard, trust their leaders, have accountability and transparency, good and respectful communication, move forward in faith formation and maturing, exercise their agency as lay and clergy members in The Episcopal Church and have a healthy community that can hold a diversity of views. I have not experienced a facile or fanciful simplicity in any of my engagement with the Steering Committee or the participants attend the convocations, but rather a deep commitment to the hard relational work that is at hand for the diocese.

A sampling of responses to the group discussion questions include:

About their **learnings and best practices of reconciliation**, participants expressed values and practices of ‘staying open and in relationship, listening well, trusting God, accepting differences, keeping an open mind, find common ground, forgive, speak truth and without judgment’. These comments are a sampling of a long list of the importance relationships people had in their lives, including with one another.

Regarding **the challenges faced in the past year**, comments included: ‘lack of trust, it is exhausting, disappointment and anger about the elections, will of majority not honored, lack of honesty, broken relationships and vilification, watching people I love splinter, the church has lost focus of its primary mission, the inability to accept an outcome, act with love, recognize when I may be wrong, humility, talked down to, not being talked “with”’.

When asked about **key underlying issues in the diocese**, the following comments were recorded: not living our baptismal covenant, ask the question – what do you want the diocese to be?

Transparency, communication, clear processes and access to the same knowledge, community building, permission for different ideas, follow the canons, general culture of distrust, reassurance we are valuable to each other.

When asked what was individually **needed to move forward** with the work of reconciliation, participants noted: communication, guidance from God, more conversation and diocesan events, clear and regular financial reports, no secrets, re-empowerment of the diocesan structure, truth-telling from diocesan leadership, visioning forward, to love one another.

As previously noted, the full list of comments made by small groups at the May convocations is attached. While 10 pages long, the list holds articulate and wise one-liners that reflect a story of faith, pain, harm, determination and hope.

It is important to note that the steering committee acknowledges that the most angry people in the diocese may not have attended these gatherings. It may have been good discernment on their part to avoid such a gathering until they were ready, and it certainly indicates that the work of listening should continue in some form. Reconciliation is not a linear process and ‘it takes the time it takes’. Nonetheless a critical mass of members of the diocese wanting to engage in the movement of reconciliation, would appear to be underway.

I close with a quote that I shared at the final convocation: “Politics is a process to deal with issues that have divided us in the past, and reconciliation is a parallel process that redesigns the relationships between us.” (Daniel Shapiro, Reconciliation Systems Design, Harvard Negotiation Review, vol 26.93)

It has been my honor and pleasure to walk with you during this season of life in the Diocese of Florida. While I have not been invited for further work, I would welcome the opportunity to continue to serve as a consultant in whatever comes next. I have noted your convention dates on my calendar in the event that you decide you might like my assistance in organizing that event and/or being a guest speaker. I will note that I am getting married in August, and so not as available as I might otherwise be during that month. Regardless, I say with confidence that the Steering Committee could design a session of your convention that would allow for fruitful conversation preceding particularly contentious resolutions.

May God’s grace and peace be known in your hearts and minds as you continue to lead the diocese at this important time.

Faithfully,

+Mary Gray-Reeves

AGENDA

9:30 Morning Prayer

9:45 Guidelines for the spiritual practices of Mutual invitation and Lectio Divina, and Diocesan Communication Norms

10:00 Opening Remarks from Bishop Mary Gray-Reeves

10:30 Lectio Divina on Ephesians 4:25-32, in small groups,* using mutual invitation.

1. What word or phrase draws your attention?
2. Where did your chosen word or phrase take your attention?
3. What are your hopes for your diocese as you engage this scripture today?

11:00 Remain in small groups and share a positive experience of reconciliation with another person that you have had in your life. In the small group create a list of learnings and best practices gained from that experience. At 11:45, share these experiences between the two groups and record them on newsprint.

Noon – Lunch

1:00 Groups of 14, again split into two groups, answer the following questions and then report back to the full group of 14 participants:

- What has been your most challenging experience in the diocese in the last two years or beyond?
- Do you think there is a key underlying issue in the diocese that needs to be resolved?

2:00 Groups of 14 stay together and record responses to the following question on newsprint:

- What do you personally need to continue the work of reconciliation going forward?

2:30 Eucharist

3:00 Departure

**Groups of 14 participants with two facilitators will split into two groups of 7 for the small group work. The two small groups will share their learnings with one another in their group of 14.*

CONVOCATION RESPONSES DURING SPRING 2024 LISTENING SESSIONS

Commonalities

Jesus, Eucharist, people have a true desire to serve each other

We pray out of the same books – BCP and scripture

We are coming together instead of pointing fingers

We are all in need of forgiveness

Prayer

Music s

Spiritual (reflection/sermon)

Psalm 133 – 1.33 degrees of separation, staying tightly woven

History

Generous outlook towards others

Common enemy – devil

We are not God

Learning and Best Practices from Stories of Reconciliation

Stay connected/staying in relationship/Stay engaged

Stay open and not make assumptions

Don't make assumptions on someone's heart or their intentions

Listen and hear what someone is saying – meaning, (read between the lines), ask questions to clarify

Create a space to have a conversation

Be patient and persistent, what is God's timing?

Trust and faith in process of reconciliation (prepare for an unexpected outcome)

Accepting other as God created them to be

Forgiveness before healing

Eucharist/sharing a meal

Owning your own mistakes

Accepting baby steps – it takes time

Realize there is more than one way
Trust God
Reconciliation: accept that we are not the same
Accept the differences
Keep an open mind
Find the common ground
Bring in a third party
Study scripture seek to understand/have empathy for other perspectives
Strive for clarity amidst one's own emotions
Don't be insistent on a particular goal
Be will willing to reflect and reframe
Listen
I am not always right
Talk to the person with the problem
Drop the caricatures
See the real person
Identify the fear – why are we afraid?
Focus on the positive aspects of the person
Engage in intimate and honest communication
Willingness to make the first move
Willingness to own our own sins
Don't give up!
Remain open
When a door opens – walk through it!
Be ready to forgive!
Trust your faith in yourself, in Jesus working in and through you
Be patient with the process
Long term process
Self-discipline/control
Prayers for others

Listening/openness
Decision to be intentional
Offer the first step
Sincerity
Vulnerability
Differences can remain
More than apologies
Can't undo a wrong
Seek help from others
Perceive others view
Respect
Put away our anger
Non-avoidance, be intentional
See your part in relationship, with respect and humility
Valuing relationship
Forgive (asking/giving)
Don't triangulate
Speak truth in love and without judgment
Never too late/give time
Surrender control
Acknowledge common goals
Seek objective outside help/mediator
Intentionality
Listen, listen, love, love
Curiosity – understanding perspective
Patience acceptance
Forgiveness = process
Openness – honesty – the work of truth telling
Kindness
Respect

Agree to disagree

Truth – speak it

Acceptance “you cannot fix it/them”

Letting go, let it/them be who they are

Kindness – “it is not about “me” but “we”

Perspective – don’t sweat the small stuff

Control the controllables – yourself

Relationship over rightness

Don’t be afraid of conflict

Conversations over a long period of time

Education and perseverance

Language and tone are important

Use “I” statements – language that invites

All wanted a positive outcome

Focus on priorities that we can agree on

Love is the Core

Reconciliation is a conscious choice to try to move past the hurt

*See the person and not the issue

See it as not someone else’s job

Come from within – must be authentic

Accept the things we cannot change

Self-reflection and self-examination

*Remember the Holy Spirit can do more through us than we can possibly imagine

Make the effort to get to know one another

Be honest about what hurt you and owning your own role in it

Being able to forgive

Listening with understanding

Ask questions to clarify and understand others point of view

Seek where someone is coming from so you may understand why feel the way they do

Understand there are many levels and perspectives to solving problems

Courage

Be curious

Be willing to be in the middle for others

Listen, wait and pray for God's resolution with patience and trust

Willingness to move forward and not be held by the past

Where is the line (clouded, moved) why do you feel this? Others see it differently

Reach out to diverse opinions, be curious about others

Understand the "why" in the emotion and the decision

Peace – do anything you can to be at peace with another person

Don't assume that everyone holds the same viewpoint

Prevent shutdown

Prayer

Willingness to listen and speak

Keep the door open

Persistence

Keep an open mind

Pray for perception

Extend grace generously

Ability to admit when we are wrong

Pause – don't react – step away – step back

Be humble – exercise humility

Leave your ego at the door

Staying together over a length of time especially through the hard stuff

Redefinition of relationship; there is no back, only forward

Reconciliation does not occur by making the 'other' more like you

The capacity for reconciliation is proportional to the value of the relationship

Only one is truly angry (or hurt) the other should be present and listen (not defend)

Patience

Be willing to admit we may have (unintentionally) hurt someone else

See painful truths as a gift/opportunity to make amends
Be willing to reciprocate when another makes a move forward
Meet the person in person
Reconciliation forms a new relationship
Time can heal wounds
Letting go can allow new beginnings to happen
Sometimes you can't resolve fundamental issues
Reconciliation requires face to face work
Reconciliation can require un-learning
Reconciliation is not 'going along to get along'
We aren't responsible for other people's reactions to our sincere belief, respectfully stated
Scripture can be helpful in finding common ground
Create space to share the hurt
Be aware of all who may be impacted or involved
Stay connected and/or make the effort to reconnect
Choosing relationship (over proving/arguing your point)
Try to accept what's offered even if it's not enough
Realize someone's hurt may not be about you... even if they attack you
Realize something casual/light/easy/accepted for you, may be deeply personal for someone else
Insisting on face-to-face, in-person communication
Don't ever give up
Write a letter with honest expression
Be willing/prepared to be surprised
Communicating intention
Humility
Ongoing process
The process is not always the same
Being willing to stay with it when there doesn't seem to be a way
Desire, willingness, openness
Give space and room

Listening without planning a response

Find middle ground

Working in your own heart to “respect the dignity of every human being”

Challenging Experience

Living with differences

Celebrating diversity

False evidence appearing real

Enter into the uncomfortable

Knowing Jesus

Recognize I may be wrong

Humility

You can both be right

Competing God values

Love wins!!”

Change expectations

Prayer and share, open heart to love

Let God work it out

Listen

Prayer is pivotal

Accepting God’s will

Act with love

It’s Exhausting

We vest our bishops with too much power – spiritual, emotional, etc. and when they become sick, there are very little mechanisms to step them back from their duties and heal them and their diocese.

Communications – unofficial

Lack of trust

Isolation from JAX and diocese

Disappointed with bishop election

Lack of support from diocese in locating clergy, searches

COVID effects on membership/attendance

Parish attendance and finances

Smaller parishes are ignored

Clear understanding of issues in diocese – no clear statement of issues from the Standing Committee

Some experience close connections to the diocese but not others

Need regional canons to be effective and support parishes

...effort toward diversity and inclusion

Church split over same-sex marriage

Conflict when requesting alternative oversight

10 year isolation of parish from diocese because of progressive theology

Inequity in ordination process

Shock of no election

Failure of last convention

Will of majority not being honored

Talked down to; not being talked “with”

Lack of honesty

Changes in the diocese over 10 years from transparency to no information

The inability to accept an outcome

Broken relationships and vilification

To watch people I love splinter

Demoralizing to watch clergy behavior – depends on the lens

The church has lost focus of primary mission

Distressed – not know what we are trying to accomplish

Key Underlying Issue in the Diocese to be Resolved

Transparency and perception

Consistency

Who gets to determine reality?

Fixation on yesterday's injuries – must be connected to tomorrow's hope and the resurrection

I/we need more together fellowship

Ask the question: what do you want the diocese to be?

We need a map – a visual of the diocese

Lack of respect

Issues in the way of love

Not living our baptismal covenant

Human sexuality

Transparency – elections and financials

Communication

Trust

Irregularities

Quorum

We are human

We all have sinned

We all need to be brave in this work

We must have trust in those who are in charge now and they must be trustworthy

With the next bishops there must be a support structure around him

Being a loner is an issue

We need to question irregularities sooner or be allowed to

transparency

At each recognition point (where it is “not right”) you have choices: call it out, leave, participate – each one has costs

When our leaders are hurting, sick, etc., they must be cared for – that is loving – otherwise the potential for injury is so high!

Before another election we must practice transparency – from the smallest parish to the largest!

Exercise reconciliation between congregations rather than within each congregation

Continue similar convocations in the future

Chaplaincy to the clergy – “need a Bishop Kaiser”

Begin searching for a new bishop

More communications to better respect each other’s feelings and views

Nurturing clergy and to be seen as valued not based on parish size

Employ Sacred Ground program
Establish a process to elect a new bishop
More involvement of the Holy Spirit in the process of electing a bishop
Reassurance we are valuable to one another
All clergy need reassurance they are valuable to the diocese
Respecting dignity of every human being, unconditional
Factionalism is road to destruction for all!
Reconciliation can only happen with those at the table
Renewed kinship restored (DOF doesn't feel like family anymore)
Mutual submission to Jesus
Lack of transparency (slow improvements noted)
Talking the talk, not walking the walk
Lack of trust in God to be an issue, so we can once again trust each other
Inclusiveness
Getting information – Reassess
Secrecy (toxic) – fear
Support issues/lack of consistency
Diocese Disconnection (personal and professional, TEC churchwide)
Truthfulness
Courtesy
Dysfunction, confusion
Correcting misinformation (publicly)
Difficult Rhetoric
Weakened systems of accountability
Abuse of Power!!!!
Forgiving Bishop Howard
Lack of financial transparency
Lack of transparency with property and assets
Censorship of all conversations regarding race, gender and sexuality
Competition among clergy

Culture of bullying and intimidation
Transparency in all areas (financial, communications, etc)
Us (parishes) vs them (diocese)
Opportunities for parishes to give feedback to diocese
Kindness
Disconnect especially from small parishes
Resolve election issue (need a leader)
More communication of parish events to other parishes
Communication
Transparency
Clear Processes
Access to same knowledge
Churches' mission has been stopped
Distrust
"The gay issue"
Learning to love those we disagree with
The election process
A missing avenue to resolve issues
A place where people can be heard
Better records
Clarity
Education
Need for community building
Need for details and nitty gritty
Convention changes: technology for voting, fill the space between ballots with music, prayer, etc., and reduce the cost for convention
More opportunities for inter-connectedness
Greater participation in this type of event
Communication to wider audience; ie., awareness of this type of event
Acknowledge people

Permission for different ideas

Respect dignity of every human being

Acceptance

Transparency

Periodic updates from Steering Committee (Standing Committee?) re: successes

Thank you for communication thus far!

Please make sure all vestry members are subscribed

Care for all parishes equally

Care for clergy equally

Discernment process needs way to understand

Structures to fix-need definitions

Transparency in everything; i.e. how decisions are made

Communications

Follow the canons

Acknowledge those who were discriminated and against and who are hurting

Clergy, get your act together

Communication and lack of general culture of distrust (anyone in a position of authority)

Societal and cultural issues driving behavior – retribution to folks

Have to carve out space for one another on human sexuality

What will personally need to continue the work of reconciliation going forward?

Jesus, others and self

Appoint single issue committees

Words matter

Prayer love

Respect

Communication

Hearing different points of view

Guidance from God

More conversation and diocesan events

More ministry

United but not uniform

Guidance (basic process/outline)

Everyone at the table (without assumptions) and fresh perspective

Ongoing and expanding communications

Clear and regular financial reports

Fun fellowship (joy) between parishes

Outreach (bringing the lost sheep into the fold)

Equity and processes”

“Let it begin with me”

Clergy Support/collegiality

Tears may be shed, this may be painful

You have to let go of: your feelings (hate?), judgments, “my” position, what others think about you, social media (Cheetos”)

Reconciliation requires identifying deep emotions and an ability and encouragement to share them

All change is loss, all loss is pain, what we choose to do with that is our choice

Transparency

No secret rules!!

Re-empower the diocesan structure (COM, SC, DC, etc)

It is time to name our issues specifically!

Use those who are actually interested in being used (i.e., our number of shepherds and flock in the diocese... we have someone who has done this...) not sure what this means....

Cross congregational discussions and opportunities

Smother and more supportive interaction with diocese

More transparency from the diocese

Visioning forward

Opportunities for collegiality and encouragement

Truth telling from diocesan leadership

Prayer

Start paying attention to Jesus

More information

Platform

Measure of selflessness

Transparency/candor

Concern/pastoral care

Functioning title IV

Public accountability respect

More conversation

To love one another

*Knowing I am respected and no fear of repercussions

*Our efforts are used/utilized

*Feedback to understand that what we said is being worked on

*Need to see outcome/action – understanding it takes time – but worth the effort

Need us to live the Nicene Creed and Lord's Prayer – walk the walk

Need more hugs

Start the job of moving forward – allow those with actual stake to walk

Leave room in our heart for the mystery and beauty of Christ

Knowing that there is a place to flourish – and a responsibility to make sure that those who have different opinions have a place to flourish

Name the conflict

Eliminate unwritten rules

Build trust

Identify the conflict, the specific issues and the specific parties involved.

Reconciliation needs to be more targeted

Conversations need to stay personal/local, not shared on social media

By God's grace we need safe space for truth-telling and to become a space where all can flourish

Listen and be open to differing opinions and to trust again

Incorporate reconciliation into the rhythm of our time at clergy conferences

Support the regional canons as a group, to help lead the process

Create space and opportunity to have open conversation as clergy
Identify where anger and woundedness is
Address the question: are we willing and able to invest in the process?
Make it interesting and fun
Stop, listen, apologize, acknowledge
Rebuild the trust in the community
Clergy participation
Insist on respecting everyone's human dignity
More opportunities to meet together as humans and have fun
Transparency of process, not just of outcome
Refrain from drawing conclusions based on who people are talking to
More honest conversation about ourselves