

Dayspring



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Joy and Hope Abound at Diocesan Convention with Ordination, Special Guests

By Linda S. Comins

A joyous, hope-filled celebration of homecoming characterized the 146th Diocesan Convention held in Martinsburg Oct. 26-28.

The Rt. Rev. Matthew D. Cowden, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia, said the convention theme – “Grow in Christ” – will be the diocese’s new theme for the next 10 years. He shared a vision for doubling the number of baptized Episcopalians statewide to 15,000 by 2033.



The Most Rev. Dr. Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of Cape Town and Metropolitan of the Anglican Province of Southern Africa, and the Rt. Rev. Matthew D. Cowden, Bishop of West Virginia, greet each other during the Peace at Diocesan Convention's Festival Eucharist on Oct. 28.

The Most Rev. Dr. Thabo Makgoba and his wife, Lungelwa Manona, from South Africa were honored guests at the convention. They participated enthusiastically in all aspects of the event. Archbishop Makgoba offered the keynote address during the Diocesan Banquet on Oct. 27.

Approximately 200 people participated in the convention, nearly double the attendance of the 2022 gathering. Trinity Church, Martinsburg, served as the host parish.

Highlighting the Diocesan Convention was the ordination of eight people to the transitional diaconate during the Oct. 28 closing festival service of Holy Eucharist at Trinity Church. Ordained as deacons were Scott Williams, Martina “Marti” Steiner Unger, Marilou McClung, Andy Bird, Klara Kovacs, Amelia “Amy” Yates McClure, William “Bill” Sigler and D. Aaron Carr.

Another highlight was a service of Noonday Prayer with the Rite of Confirmation conducted at the historic Christ Church in Bunker Hill. Convention-goers filled the small church, also known as “Morgan’s Chapel,” on Oct. 27 to witness Bishop Cowden confirm Jane Rose Elizabeth Edwards, a member of Trinity, Martinsburg. After worship, the visitors enjoyed a picnic on the church lawn.



The Rt. Rev. Matthew D. Cowden, Bishop of West Virginia, poses with the new deacons ordained during Diocesan Convention's Festival Eucharist at Trinity Episcopal Church, Martinsburg. In the front row from left are the Revs. Andy Bird, Martina Steiner Unger, Amy Yates McClure, Klara Mae Kovacs and Marilu McClung; back row from left, the Revs. Scott Williams, William Sigler and D. Aaron Carr.

Morgan’s Chapel, established in 1740, represents the oldest Episcopal congregation in present-day West Virginia. The current building dates from 1851.

During Diocesan Convention’s business session, clergy and lay delegates accepted a balanced budget of \$1.8 million for 2024. Diocesan Treasurer Thomas Farnsworth announced that the

missionary apportionment rate has been lowered from 16 percent to 15 percent for the coming year.

Gat Caperton, of St. Mark’s, Berkeley Springs, was re-elected as a diocesan trustee. The Rev. Zach Drennen, priest-in-charge of St. James’ in Lewisburg, and William Grow Jr., also from St. Mark’s, Berkeley Springs, were elected to the Standing Committee.

Linda Comins, a delegate from St. Matthew’s, Wheeling, was elected as secretary of Diocesan Convention. Bishop Cowden thanked John Canfield, from St. Matthew’s, Charleston, for seven years of faithful service as an assistant chancellor and as secretary of Diocesan Convention.

Elected to the Sandscrest Board were Grow; Donald Rebich of St. Luke’s, Wheeling; and Charles McFadden, Laura Mull and Erin Rothenbuehler, all from St. Matthew’s, Wheeling.

Convention voters consented to Bishop Cowden’s request to change the geographic boundaries of the Ohio Valley and Southwestern deaneries to place St. John’s, Ripley, and Grace Church, Ravenswood, in the Ohio Valley Deanery.

Consents also were given for the appointment of the Rev. Dean Lawrence as dean of the Monongahela Deanery and the appointment of the Rev. Susan Claytor as dean of the New Southern Deanery and as intake officer for the diocese.

Convention voters adopted a resolution asking Bishop Cowden to establish a task force to review the current deanery structure and to make recommendations to the bishop and next year’s Diocesan Convention.

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Bishop Calls for Doubling Number of Episcopalians in Diocese

By Linda S. Comins

Bishop Matthew D. Cowden believes the number of baptized Episcopalians in the Diocese of West Virginia can be doubled in the coming decade.

Speaking at the 2023 Diocesan Convention in Martinsburg, Bishop Cowden said “Grow in Christ” will be the diocese’s new theme for the next 10 years. The theme builds upon the 2022 convention theme, “Abide in Christ. Let. Us. Pray.”

While traveling throughout the Mountain State, the bishop said

he reflected upon the Bishop Search Committee video’s narrative that there were 7,500 Episcopalians statewide in 2021. As he prayed, he envisioned doubling that number by 2033.

Offering a homily for the Evening Prayer service at Trinity Church, Bishop Cowden said the theme of “Grow in Christ” is built upon the sure foundation of Jesus Christ and on a foundation of prayer. He called on West Virginia Episcopalians to be “faithful to the Word and faithful to one another.”

The bishop noted that “the

strength and health of our Church is built upon the health of our relationships.”

He said the diocese is blessed to have sites dedicated for three types of ministry: pilgrimage (Peterkin), retreat (Sandscrest) and mission (Highland Educational Project).

Bishop Cowden opened his annual convention address by observing, “We have seen many miraculous things in the Diocese of West Virginia ... Faith in miracles has been abundant.”

People in the diocese are “trying new things to grow, not only

in numbers but also in the knowledge and love of the Lord,” he said.

Bishop Cowden cited several signs of growth, including the diocese’s new Grow Church congregational development initiative, a diocesan Stewardship Weekend held in Wheeling in September, online theological studies offered through the Stevenson School, growth in lay ministries, and “new life from our old churches” in the form of feeding programs.

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Bishop Matthew D. Cowden preaches at the Ordination and closing Holy Eucharist service at Trinity Church, Martinsburg.

Bishop Calls for Doubling Numbers

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Bishop Matthew D. Cowden delivers his Convention Address during the Oct. 26 session of Diocesan Convention at the Holiday Inn, Martinsburg.

Reviewing the diocese's three primary ministries, the bishop said Peterkin is "a place of pilgrimage and a place that is holy." He called for more extensive use of the facilities beyond five weeks of summer camp.

Bishop Cowden said he is thankful for all involved in the transformation of Peterkin, with a working board taking an entrepreneurial approach to operations. He thanked the Peterkin search committee and its new director, Jim Cormack, for the work that he has begun.

He also thanked Sandscrest Director Cheryl Harshman and Assistant Director Chris Villamagna for their work. "It (Sandscrest) is a place where you can let your spirit rest," he commented, but added that expansion of its facilities is needed.

The bishop thanked the Rev. Paul Barker, new director of the Highland Educational Project and priest-in-charge of Christ Church,

Bluefield, for the ministry being done in one of the nation's poorest areas.

Groups from across the country are being invited to visit HEP for mission trips. "There are projects to do, but more importantly, relationships to build in McDowell County," the bishop said.

Reiterating the vision of having 15,000 baptized Episcopalians in West Virginia by 2033, the bishop cited the new congregational development program, Grow Church, as one of the tools to accomplish this goal. The two-year program, consisting of eight sessions, is not "a quick fix," but is being used in multiple dioceses across the country.

"It (Grow Church) gives us levels for understanding our communities. It also gives us a model for evangelism," he said.

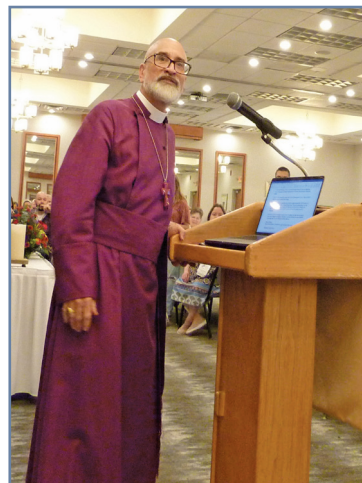
Bishop Cowden called for training lay evangelists to connect people, teach and "tell our stories." He suggested sending out

lay evangelists, two by two and carrying the Book of Common Prayer, to go door to door and share the stories of their baptized lives.

In the sermon for the ordination of eight new deacons, Bishop Cowden reminded them that "a deacon is a deacon forever," while serving as "a bridge for a broken world and a boat for those who need to cross a river" and "an icon that shares the Good News with everyone."

He commented, "Deacons remind us of our service, our call to Christ as the servants of God."

The bishop advised the new deacons, "Keep your mind focused on Jesus even when it's not fun. ... Make your life an icon of Christ all aflame."



Bishop Matthew D. Cowden gives a shout-out to youth attending the convention.

The Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia

Bishop

The Rt. Rev. Matthew D. Cowden

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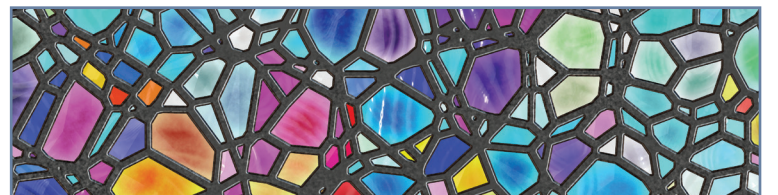
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Convention Opens with Evening Prayer at Trinity Church



Melissa Cowden and guest Lungelwa Manona from South Africa chat prior to the Evening Prayer service at Trinity Church, Martinsburg.



Bishop Matthew D. Cowden leaves Trinity Church after Evening Prayer.

South African Archbishop Thabo Makgoba Translates ‘Christian Hope into Action’

The Most Rev. Dr. Thabo Makgoba and his wife, Lungelwa Manona, from South Africa were honored guests at the Diocese of West Virginia’s 2023 convention.

Archbishop Makgoba offered the keynote address during the Diocesan Banquet on Oct. 27. He spoke on growing the church and bringing hope and joy to the lives of people.

The Archbishop began his remarks by noting that in a 1966 speech, U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy drew startling parallels between the United States and South Africa.

Archbishop Makgoba then observed, “Nearly 60 years later, both our nations are very different from the way they were then. Although we still have a way to go – a long way in some respects – in the areas of racial justice, the treatment of women and the rights of the LGBTQI community, we are nevertheless better countries than we were in the mid-1960s. But we also face significant challenges if we are to realize what Jesus promised us, as recorded in John 10, verse 10, when he said: ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’”

Today, he said, the single biggest challenge in South Africa is “the yawning gap between rich and poor.” Another major challenge is unemployment that arises from the decline of older industries, such as mining.

Archbishop Makgoba has served as the Archbishop of Cape Town and the Metropolitan of the Anglican Province of Southern Africa since January 2008. He is the youngest person elected to this office, which was held by Archbishop Desmond Tutu from 1986-1996.

Referring to the context in which South Africans are called to do church, he said, “For us, the shining example of evangelization was provided during the apartheid years by our beloved Archbishop Desmond Tutu ... He showed us that the way to draw people to Christ was to read and interpret our situation honestly and concretely, and then to preach a Gospel which spoke to the lives of those we sought to draw to Christ – a Gospel which addressed their lived experience and their needs.

“Scholars who have explored lessons to be learned from the legacy of Desmond Tutu speak of him as someone who filled vacuums in our witness in the public domain at a time when there was a credibility deficit in many areas,

ranging from how we expressed and lived out our faith to the way in which we allowed old prejudices to play out in our political choices. It was this which made him a prophetic character,” the current Archbishop said.

Archbishop Makgoba said, “At a time of suffering, as we struggled to liberate our country from institutionalized racism, and then as we began to build our democracy, Desmond Tutu’s advocacy of a new society, a society of compassion and caring, enhanced the credibility of the Gospel.”

He continued, “Desmond Tutu sent out his own ripples of hope with his emphasis on enhancing the agency of what he called ‘so-called ordinary people’, so-called, he used to say, because in his theology, nobody is ordinary, every individual is special because you and I, and every single person, are created in the image of God. He used to say: ‘Do your little bit of good where you are. It’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.’ For him, it was the agency of the anonymous people of goodwill that is a key driver for change.”

Archbishop Makgoba told the convention, “For me, hope and the joy to which it gives rise – a joy to which Desmond Tutu gave voice in cackles of laughter, even in situations of tension and stress – is epitomized in one of his simplest and most direct assertions. ... His most fundamental assertion was expressed in just three words. Desmond Tutu used to tell us, over and over, that actually, at its root, he had only one sermon. That sermon was: ‘God loves you.’ That was it: ‘God loves



The Most Rev. Dr. Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of Cape Town and Metropolitan of the Anglican Province of Southern Africa, enters Trinity Episcopal Church, Martinsburg, for the festival service of Holy Eucharist Oct. 28.

you.’ Three little words. Sometimes he added a fourth: ‘God loves you. Full-stop.’”

Archbishop Makgoba added that the Apostle Paul, in Romans 5:3-5, helps us to understand how God’s love enables us to live in hope.

“So, for myself, when I speak of hope I am not speaking of a nebulous concept. I am not speaking of hope as an anesthetic to distract us from the harsh realities of the world, or to kill the pain of its suffering,” the Archbishop commented. “No, it means being determined to identify our problems and our differences, precisely in order to mobilize people to overcome them.

“For me, hope is the conviction that we are called or invited by God to participate in God’s mission in the world, and that it is a call to which we respond because we believe in the love of God declared in Jesus Christ.”

He recalled that Tutu would say: “We are made to tell the world that there are no outsiders. All are welcome; black or white, red, yellow, rich, poor, educated, not educated, male, female, gay or straight, all, all, all. ... We belong to this family, this human family, God’s family.”

Archbishop Makgoba said that for Tutu, “this challenge, extending this sense of welcome and belonging, is at the heart of our evangelism and the very key to our public witness.”

The Archbishop added, “He (Tutu) also understood that in a world dominated by ideology, by rigidity, we need a space to listen to the still quiet voice of God, to listen to each other, to create the life-giving spaces without which we will flounder. He understood in his very bones the enlivening spirit and power of prayer.”

Archbishop Makgoba’s ministry has been shaped by his work as a social and climate justice activist and as an education activist. He has been part of an international initiative, called Courageous Conversations, in which diverse leaders work together on the challenges facing the mining industry.

“It is such initiatives in the world which help me translate my Christian hope into action, and give me confidence in the future, knowing that victory has already been attained through the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus,” he said.

Archbishop Makgoba concluded his address by saying, “God loves us all, Americans, South Africans,



The Most Rev. Dr. Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of Cape Town, delivers the keynote address at the 2023 Diocesan Convention.



The Most Rev. Dr. Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of Cape Town, chats with the Rev. Cheryl Winter at the Diocesan Convention banquet at the Holiday Inn in Martinsburg Oct. 27.

Palestinians, Israelis, Ukrainians, Russians. God loves the whole of humanity, as well as God’s whole creation. May we fulfill God’s desire that we preserve and protect all God’s children, and all God’s creation, for our children and grandchildren to come. God bless

you, God bless South Africa, and God bless America.”



Bishop Cowden's Diocesan Convention Address 2023

Grow in Christ: Doubling the number of Episcopalians in West Virginia over the next ten years.

The Rt. Rev. Matthew Davis Cowden
VIII Bishop of West Virginia

The Bishop opened with the familiar joke about the Catholic priest, Episcopal priest, and Baptist minister in a boat and the first two walking on water. After the last one sinks and the common punchline, "should we tell him where the stones are?" is said, and the convention's obligatory laughter at the Bishop telling this familiar joke, the Bishop then added an addendum punchline, with the Episcopal priest turning to the Catholic priest and saying, "What stones?" A different laughter followed.

The Bishop went on to say as follows:

We are indeed, seeing and doing miraculous things in the Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia. Clergy and lay leaders are already stepping out in faith all over the diocese. Many congregations are accustomed to passing a faith budget, budgeting for the next year and trusting in the Holy Spirit to bring the funding needed; and we are used to doing faith programming, creating ministries and building it for new people to come; and more, we see congregations opening doors to a festival in their community and participating without outreach. Lay leaders without clergy are regularly saying morning prayer, becoming licensed to preach or using Sermons That Work in our pulpits. You are keeping our congregations going through prayer and participation. Many of us, especially since the pandemic, are trying new technology. Others are taking courageous step to paying off a mortgage or replacing an aging roof before calling a new rector. We are already trying new things being faithfully done around the diocese to grow the church, not just in numbers, but growing in knowledge and love of the Lord.

One of my favorite stories about growth is about a rector who at the very first vestry meeting passed around a piece of paper for the vestry to sign, the new rector agreed to stay on as long as every vestry member signed the covenant. The first part of the covenant said we are going to grow, and we are going to grow in this church more than we could ever ask or imagine. The vestry cheered when they read the first part. Then they read the second part of the paper that they had to agree with: we are going to hate it. Growth calls us to change and try new things, and that is the hard part.

You're not going to be signing a piece of paper, but you, and I, are called to grow; to grow in Christ. I consider your signing on for this covenant through your baptism or



Bishop Matthew D. Cowden delivers his Convention Address during the Oct. 26 session of Diocesan Convention at the Holiday Inn, Martinsburg.

confirmation or reception as your assent. Your signature is God's holy mark already on you, marked as Christ's own forever; for the growth of Christ in you, and for the growing in the Church that we are called to do here in West Virginia.

Yes, you are going to grow in Christ more than you could ask or imagine, and there will be days that you are not going to like it one little bit. We proclaim Glory to God who can do more than we can either ask or imagine in us and in the church, but there is a caveat: God who meets us where we are, loves us too much to leave us as we are. God meets us right where we are, that's true and comforting, but God always calls more from us, more to give and let go of, more to grow in, and to a greater life than we have right now.

During my first full year as your Diocesan Bishop, I heard the call loud and clear and I share it with you now: we are called to double in the numbers of Episcopalians in the state and Diocese of West Virginia. When the thought first crossed my mind, I laughed to myself and moved on to another thought. I was staring out the windshield at the time on one of those beautiful long drives across the diocese; when immediately, without time to think, another thought, not my own, pulled me back to this crazy idea I had just dismissed. The voice, if it was a voice, simply said "think about it."

I started considering the possibilities of doubling our numbers in ten years. I realized that we have not grown as a Church because we've never really tried to. The letter from James says "you have not because you ask not." We have not properly done evangelism in most of The Episcopal Church, and certainly not in West Virginia for a long time.

Ephesians 1: 10 reminds us that our mission is to restore all people to God and one another in Christ, re-

peated in our prayer book on page 855 in our catechism, "the mission of the church is restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."

For us, that's a focus on baptism, whether it's as simple as having our baptism recorded in the congregation we are attending, counting those who are already here, inviting those who have not been grafted into the body of Christ to join us through baptism, or reaching out to those who were already baptized, but are looking for looking for a better way, one that is traditional and inclusive, open and orthodox. That's us as Anglicans and Episcopalians in the mountain state and we have a particular loving voice for introducing people to Christ through our traditions, the scripture, and reason. Why focus on baptism? In Matthew 28: 19-20, with the words of Jesus in red, and with a command as strong, as "do this in memory of me" we find the words of Jesus saying "go into all the world and baptized, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

And friends, we are already doing this. Where we are going, where we are called to go, we are already seeing the fruits of tending to our soil and soul. This growth is already happening. Your participation, you're willingness to try new things, your willingness to discover new ways of communicating, operating and engaging in the programs we are offering, is all a testament to Jesus Christ, alive and well and infusing our exciting if messy work of revival, dare I say resurrection.

And here are some examples of where we are seeing revival and resurrection already happening around the diocese.

St. Andrew's Mountain Mission: The Blue Ridge food pantry opened in our former church, St Andrew's in Shannondale. The food pantry is building on our long-standing partnership with St Andrew's Mountain Mission and finding new ways to feed God's people on the mountain and a prayerful way to engage and rehabilitate our closed church.

Stewardship: We see new life in the Stewardship program we ran this fall called Growing Givers' Hearts, running both a clergy and whole parish day. Thank you to Fr Joshua Saxe and the congregation of St. Matthew's, Wheeling for having the idea and hosting it for the diocese. We will be doing more events like these.

Moving from the Iona program to the Stevenson School: Our growth is also seen in embracing a new model for ongoing lay edu-

cation and formation and for the education and formation of locally formed clergy. This year we said a tender goodbye to our use of the Iona School as a beloved program for many years. As a ministry it suffered from an identity crisis about its role among us. The Stevenson School will be used as a resource for our formation and education of locally trained clergy and for the development of lay ministers.

EYE and EYC: Three of our diocesan youth participated in the Episcopal Youth Event in Baltimore this year and we are in the process of reviving the Episcopal Youth Council, whose President has seat voice and vote on Diocesan Council.

Peterkin, reawakening and transformation of our place of Pilgrimage: We have the gift of incredible land and history in Romney and Hampshire County, a thousand acres of uniquely preserved wildlife, with generations of memories. Truth be told, if it was just a summer camp for youth, with the diocese giving a half million a year, and if we were to simply run five stellar weeks of programming, creating peak experiences and positive lifelong memories for young people and helping them to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church, then it would still be worth every penny and more. But God who meets us where we are is not content to leave us as we are. Even a moderate investment for only five weeks of a 52-week year is poor stewardship of this incredible gift. We are called to grow and do more with this unique gift than we have ever done before. Having spent the summer there with Melissa I can now see what it's going to be, among other things: a place of pilgrimage, rustic retreats, solitude, outside church groups, something akin to the Wild Goose Festival in North Carolina but with a West Virginia, Appalachian flair. I am grateful to our new director, Jim Cormack, for taking on the many areas of deferred maintenance, including that of buildings, vision, and stewardship.

Sandscrest, growing in our place for Retreat: Director Cheryl Harshman and Assistant Director Chris Villamagna have done incredible spiritual work in tending to the property and to the souls of all those who come to this thin place. The new board and I will be looking at ways to not only improve the historic house, but how we want to develop the footprint and facilities for the next generation.

Highland Educational Project, renewing our place of diocesan

Mission: I am grateful for the new director, Fr. Paul Barker, for engaging in the relationships with the mission groups and the neighbors of Premier Park.

New Clergy: More ordinations this year than in many previous years combined. Eight transitional deacons tomorrow, and many more to come. New bishops often put a pause on ordinations while they retool the process. We cannot afford to do that, our Church needs clergy, and the Holy Spirit doesn't stop moving just because there's a change of bishop. But please bear with us during the messiness of redesigning the process while we respect the canonical processes and discover new ways of raising up individuals for ordained ministry.

Grow Church: DCDI underway: Grow Church is our new signature Congregational Development Ministry for the diocese. This is a two-year program. It's not a quick fix, no lasting change comes from a quick fix or one-off program. Growing and developing your congregation for the best health takes time and attention, it takes discomfort as we grow in ourselves and develop new skills, and new patterns of behavior for growth. Grow Church:DCDI will include elements of Christian formation, models for better understanding your church and community and experiments, projects for promoting growth, and a model for evangelism.

So how are we going to double the number of Baptized Episcopalians in 10 years, 14,000 by 2033? This could be as simple as keeping better records, recording new members in parish registers, communicating these numbers. This is being good stewards of those who are already in our midst. It will also take being intentional in thinking about Baptism and Baptismal Identity and being intentional about being Evangelists.

There are four levels of Evangelists, and these are being trained in Grow Church: DCDI.

Level 1: Connector: Makes connections, invites people to check out your church people, active listeners, seeking out the lost, looking for those who long for community and hunger for a yet more excellent way. Able to tell your story, tell the story of your people/congregation.

Level 2: Companion: A shepherd and one who will follow up with people; active listeners, empathizers, make introductions to others, sponsors, witnesses their faith in Christ to others, invites to dinners and events, goes with others to din-

ners and events.

Level 3: Catechist (also a separate Lay License), teachers who tell the Church's story, Biblical history, Church history, able to articulate Anglican and Episcopal history and identity, able to prepare others for Baptism or Confirmation.

Level 4: Caller: This is a local missionary, a door-to-door evangelist who passes out the Book of Common Prayer, inviting or creating a connection point with for those living in the local parish to identify and know the Episcopal congregation near them. Callers are identified by dress and speech as those who represent The Episcopal Church. Callers may also set up in a coffee shop or a frequented "third space" where people gather. The BCP is our greatest evangelism tool, and bookmarks or pasted insert with the website or contact info for your local congregation is part of the key in sharing it, as well as a bookmark or similar that says directs the peruser to prayers they may find helpful in time of need.

Our growth has a plan, there are steps to it, there are structures we can see and structures we can't see that are guiding us to grow individually in our relationship with Christ and one another, and to fulfill the great commission, in our community and beyond, in West Virginia.

Think about it. Think about baptism. Take courage to tell your story and share your baptized life with others. Work as if it all depends on you, pray and listen because it all really depends on God.

Then in ten years, when we look back over the way that we have come, when we have grown more than we ever thought possible, discovered new life in our relationship with Jesus Christ and with one another, met difficulties and yet still doubled in our number of Baptized Episcopalians, when we write the book together about what God has been doing in West Virginia and among us as Episcopal Christians, when they ask us, "How did you grow in your faith and how did you grow the Church when the rest of the mainline churches are just trying to get our footing?" When in ten years they ask if we knew how to walk this path and who showed us the secret way to get there; when they ask us where the secret stones are that are just beneath the surface which must have supported us in our faith and practice to produce such a great miracle, then we will turn with a quizzical and yet holy look on our faces and simply reply, "What stones?"



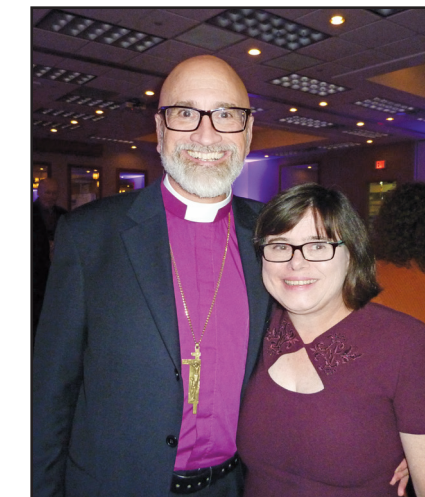
The Rev. Bobby Shives, rector of Trinity Church, Martinsburg, welcomes guests to Diocesan Convention.



Participating in Diocesan Convention's business session are, from left, Canon Catherine Saxe, Diocesan Treasurer Thomas Farnsworth, the Rev. Canon Chad Slater, Diocesan Chancellor Karen Klein, Bishop Matthew D. Cowden, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba of South Africa and Convention Secretary Linda Comins.



Sandscrest Director Cheryl Ryan Harshman stands at the retreat center's booth at Diocesan Convention.



Bishop Matthew and Melissa Cowden enjoy the dance after the convention banquet at the Holiday Inn, Martinsburg.



Pocket prayer quilts were given out at Diocesan Convention.



Emma Slater conducts the United Thank Offering in-gathering. The Rev. Dr. Nancy Woodworth-Hill presents a UTO contribution from Lawrencefield Parish Church, Wheeling.



The new Episcopal Youth Council meets in person and on Zoom during Diocesan Convention.



The Commission on Spirituality presents a Taize prayer experience at convention.

Diocesan Convention.....

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Also approved were resolutions urging Episcopalians “to pray for all victims of gun violence” and “to work toward and pray for a peaceful resolution to the current conflict in the Middle East which directly affects the safety of innocent Israelis and Palestinians.”

The Holiday Inn in Martinsburg served as the convention head quarters. Events began Oct. 26 with Evening Prayer and opening business at Trinity Church, the host parish.

The Oct. 27 business session included reports on activity at the diocese’s three ministry sites.

The Rev. Paul Barker, director of the Highland Educational Project, said three mission groups visited HEP in 2023, with six groups already committed for the coming year. A children’s literacy lending library has been established.

HEP can serve as “a spiritual home for the community and the groups that visit us,” the director said. Chapel space has been designated in an unused office.

Peterkin Director Jim Cormack said events have included a work weekend, a four-day silent retreat for 73 people and an Autumn at Peterkin weekend that drew about 40 people. The new director thanked retired director Daisy McBride and her husband Gary for keeping Peterkin going for decades.

One more summer camp is being added for 2024, and two silent retreats are booked, Cormack said.

Sandscrest Director Cheryl Harshman said the retreat center has attracted a diverse array of visitors, including plein air painters, icon writers, and Scottish deerhounds and their people, in 2023.

Citing the Celtic concept of a thin place as a short distance between Heaven and Earth, she said, “Sandscrest is a thin place. ... a thin place like Sandscrest makes us feel something larger than ourselves, as though we are held between worlds, beyond experience.”



Bishop Matthew D. Cowden preaches at the Evening Prayer service that opened Diocesan Convention at Trinity Church, Martinsburg.

Extending an invitation to Sandscrest, Harshman said, “We would be happy to have you come alone on a private retreat or with a group. Together we can take a moment to find the calm, the peace, the place for the mystery of God’s grace to unfold, be retold, and be re-lived in our lives.”

The newly revitalized Diocesan Youth Council met in person and on Zoom during convention. Andrew Brown, from St. Matthew’s, Wheeling, was elected president of the council.

Children and youth enjoyed special programming throughout the convention. They also attended worship services with their families.

A reorganizational session for Women’s Ministries attracted a large audience. Chancellor Karen Klein, who convened the gathering, said they agreed to form a task force to examine how Women’s Ministries is organized and to develop a plan for the leadership and structure of the various projects that traditionally have fallen under the umbrella of Women’s Ministries.

Two training and education seminars were offered during the convention. Canon Catherine Saxe, diocesan Canon for Ministry and Mission, presented a program on “Stewardship and Kids.” Members of the Commission on Spirituality led a Taizé worship

experience.

At the bishop’s request, the Rev. G. T. Schramm gave the invocation at the Diocesan Banquet. He will be retiring in December after 41 years as rector of Trinity Church, Shepherdstown.

Bishop Cowden also recognized four other priests retiring in 2023: the Rev. Cheryl Winter, St. Timothy’s in-the-Valley, Hurricane; the Rev. John Valentine, St. Paul’s, Weston, and Transfiguration, Buckhannon; the Rev. Jim Morgan, Trinity Church, Huntington; and the Rev. Maggie Blanchard, New River Episcopal Ministries.

The bishop welcomed the Rev. Gina Griffith, who was ordained to the vocational diaconate; the Rev. Timothy Allen and the Rev. Christopher Scott, who were ordained to the transitional diaconate; the Rev. Paul Barker and the Rev. Nancy Martin, who were ordained to the priesthood.

Four new rectors were recognized: the Very Rev. Bobby Shives, Trinity Church, Martinsburg; the Very Rev. David Johnston, Trinity Church, Huntington; the Rev. Michael Delk, St. Thomas a Becket, Morgantown; and the Rev. Gregory Pennington, St. John’s, Huntington.

Looking ahead, Bishop Cowden said archivists are needed to review diocesan history for the diocese’s 150th anniversary in 2027. Names are being sought for a diocesan Property and Loan Committee.

The next Diocesan Convention will be held at Stonewall Resort on Nov. 15-16, 2024. Christ Church, Clarksburg, and St. Barnabas Chapel, Bridgeport, will serve as hosts. (The original convention dates – Nov. 1-2 – were changed because of a scheduling conflict with the installation of the next Presiding Bishop.)

Linda S. Comins is editor of Day-spring and a member of St. Matthew’s, Wheeling.

Convention Banquet



Andrew Brown, from St. Matthew’s, Wheeling, is the new president of the revitalized Episcopal Youth Council.



The Rev. Joshua Saxe and his daughter, Willa, meet honored guest Lungelwa Manona from South Africa.



Enjoying social time before the convention banquet are, from left, Willa Saxe, the Rev. Joshua Saxe, the Rev. Canon Chad Slater, Canon Catherine Saxe and the Rev. Canon Jordan Trumble.

Next Diocesan Convention
Stonewall Resort
Nov. 15-16, 2024

Christ Church, Clarksburg and St. Barnabas Chapel, Bridgeport will serve as hosts.

Historic Morgan's Chapel Finds New Purpose

By Linda S. Comins

A spirit of love and healing prevailed as a gem of Episcopal heritage in the Eastern Panhandle found a new purpose for this year's Diocesan Convention.

Historic Christ Church in Bunker Hill was the site of a service of Noonday Prayer with the Rite of Confirmation. Convention participants boarded chartered buses to travel the short distance from the convention headquarters in Martinsburg to Bunker Hill for worship and a picnic on Oct. 27.

Convention-goers filled the small church, also known as "Morgan's Chapel," to witness Bishop Matthew D. Cowden confirm Jane Rose Elizabeth Edwards, a member of Trinity Church, Martinsburg.

Morgan's Chapel, established in 1740, represents the oldest Episcopal congregation in present-day West Virginia. The current building dates from 1851.

The church was started by Col. Morgan Morgan, Dr. John Briscoe and Jacob Hite. The original wooden building apparently developed structural deficiencies. Records indicate that during the Revolutionary War, funds were being raised to build a new church, but county officials ordered that the money be confiscated and used to buy gunpowder and lead.

After the war, the funds were returned and a stone church was erected. According to local lore, lay leader Morgan Morgan II was so beloved that the church was re-named Morgan's Chapel upon his death in 1797.

In 1851, the stone church – destroyed by a "calamity" -- was replaced with the current brick structure. Bishop William Meade of Virginia consecrated the new building in 1852.

During the Civil War, the building was occupied by Union soldiers who filled the walls with graffiti. Their writings – painted over after the war – remained hidden for more than a century.

Services were conducted regularly in the chapel until about 1911. It was used sporadically until the early 1980s, when the Rev. Alice Thornton Bicking

established a diocesan mission called Christ Church. The mission ceased operations in the mid-1990s.

After the chapel's closure, an arson fire in the rear of the building damaged the paint, exposing some of the Civil War graffiti. A newspaper article about the discovery generated interest from historical circles in the early 2000s.

When paint layers were removed, more inscriptions were found. As the hidden graffiti was uncovered, it became apparent that the soldiers had written on nearly every section of the building's interior walls.

Speaking to convention visitors, the Rev. Canon Chad Slater, the diocese's Canon to the Ordinary, said the Union soldiers' writings and inscriptions included a depiction of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee as a chicken.

Before the historic graffiti was discovered, the building fell into disrepair and sustained water damage. Vandals used red spray paint to create their own graffiti.

In recent years, the diocese has made efforts to preserve the building. Local volunteers, including Bill Grantham and Lee Jones, have overseen the projects. Bishop Cowden has called for the church to be restored.

Canon Slater said that a new



Guests line up for lunch on the lawn at Morgan's Chapel.

roof, a climate control system and a security system have been installed. A handicap-accessible ramp has been constructed at the rear entrance.

Inside the building, plaster work is being repaired; woodwork is being refinished and historic pews are being refurbished. Plans include constructing a restroom in the back room and installing lighting and furnishings appropriate for a 19th-century structure.

Offering a homily at the prayer service, Canon Slater compared the Civil War graffiti to the writing on the walls warning King Belshazzar in the Book of Daniel.

"The writing on these walls is testimony for what happened," Canon Slater said, adding, "It is better for us to be a people united, rather than a people divided. ... We are called as Christians to be a people of peace, a people of love and a people of generosity."



Bishop Matthew D. Cowden confirms Jane Rose Elizabeth Edwards during the Noonday Prayer service at Morgan's Chapel

He noted that it has taken more than a century to find peace and heal divisions, and the work is not finished.

Confronting a painful chapter in church history, Canon Slater pointed out that the chapel's side door and balcony were used as the entrance and gallery for enslaved people. "The Church has not always been good about being the Church," he observed.



Among the convention participants awaiting the Noonday Prayer service at Christ Church (Morgan's Chapel), Bunker Hill, are Lungelwa Manona, center, and her husband, the Most Rev. Dr. Thabo Makgoba from South Africa.

"The Church has had divisions. We vow to name them and never repeat them," he said.

When the congregation assembled for Noonday Prayer sang "Amazing Grace" as the opening hymn, "this place reverberated with a spirit of joy and love that I think can heal the nations," he concluded.

Donations for the chapel's restoration may be sent to the Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia, Morgan's Chapel, P.O. Box 5400, Charleston, WV 25361.

Linda S. Comins is editor of *Day-spring*.



Children examine one of the old tombstones in the churchyard at Morgan's Chapel.

Scenes From Thursday Convention Dinner

Diocesan Convention delegates, clergy and guests attend the Oct. 25 dinner at the Holiday Inn, Martinsburg.



Bishop Matthew D. Cowden speaks at the Noonday Prayer service at Morgan's Chapel, while the Rev. Canon Chad Slater looks on.

Bishop Ordains Eight to the Diaconate at Convention



The Rev. Al Prichard, deacon from Thomas a Becket, Morgantown, proclaims the Gospel at Dioesan Convention's concluding Holy Eucharist.



Ordinands lie prostrate in the center aisle of Trinity Church, Martinsburg.



Bishop Matthew D. Cowden ordains eight deacons during Dioesan Convention's concluding Holy Eucharist.



Bishop Matthew D. Cowden celebrates Holy Eucharist. He is flanked by the Rev. Al Prichard and Archbishop Thabo Makgoba from South Africa.



Awaiting their ordination to the diaconate are, from left, Martina Steiner Unger, Amy Yates McClure, D. Aaron Carr, Andy Bird, William Sigler, Klara Kovacs, Scott Williams and Marilu McClung.



Bishop Matthew and Melissa Cowden pose for pictures after the conclusion of Dioesan Convention's service of Ordination and Holy Eucharist.



A combined choir from Eastern Panhandle churches enters Trinity, Martinsburg, for Dioesan Convention's concluding Holy Eucharist.

Episcopal Diocese of WV
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