

A Word from the Bishop

Dear Friends:

On the 25th of January, the day the church celebrates the Conversion of St. Paul, I observed the ninth anniversary of my ordination and consecration as a bishop in the Episcopal Church and more especially as the Bishop of Easton. As I start my tenth year, I thank God for the privilege and opportunity to be your bishop and share ministry with you.

In December at our convocation meetings, the question was raised, “What exactly does the diocese do?” Connected to that inquiry is, “What does the bishop do?”

I am fully aware that the questions were asked in the context of a budget presentation. The question is a fair one that I believe deserves an explanation, or at least the beginning of an opportunity to openly discuss the entire subject of what is called, in Greek, “episkope.” The word is used to describe the ministry of a bishop.

It comes from the amalgamation of the Greek words for “over” (epi) and “seeing” (scopus). As one scholar has stated, “it is the defining concept of a denomination which does not want its congregations to regard themselves as an independent unity but which has as its fundamental philosophy that there is a living relationship between each and all.” (Malcolm Grundy, *Leadership and Oversight: New Models for Episcopal Ministry*, London: Mowbray, 2011, p. 8)

This oversight responsibility is given to the bishop by his or her election to a specific geographic jurisdiction, known in our case as the Diocese of Easton. When a bishop of a diocese dies in office, or announces her or his retirement or resignation, a selection process, similar to the ones carried out in a parish selection of a rector, begins. Once a search committee announces its vision for what gifts they are seeking in a new bishop, and nominees are chosen to stand for election, a special convention is held with the sole responsibility of electing a bishop.

Those electing the new bishop are chosen from the individual parishes of the diocese. The clergy canonically resident are entitled to vote as well as the lay representatives chosen by each parish at their annual meetings. Sometimes the parish delegates are also the delegates to the diocesan convention.

After a thorough and prayerful examination of the nominees, the special convention gathers and votes until an individual is chosen by a majority in each order, clergy and lay, of the electors present. The Constitution of our diocese words it like this: “the election of a bishop... shall be made in open convention by a concurrent vote of the clergy and the laity, voting separately by ballot, the clergy first and then the laity, and a concurrent majority of those present and entitled to vote in each order shall be necessary.” (Article V, Section 3, Paragraph (a))



The ministry of a bishop is a living relationship with all the members of a diocese

The further approval of the election of a bishop comes from the Standing Committees and bishops of the rest of the dioceses of our Episcopal Church, 108 other jurisdictions. Once a majority of consents to the election is given by both groups, a consecration is held and a bishop is ordained and consecrated, he or she entrusted with the oversight of a diocese with the authority to be the bishop.

The oversight of a bishop extends to all aspects of diocesan life. The ministry of a bishop is a living relationship between the bishop and each priest and deacon in the diocese as well as with all the lay members of the parishes. In our case, the Diocese of Easton extends from the Pennsylvania line in the north to the Virginia line in the south, to the Delaware line and Atlantic Ocean on the east and the Chesapeake Bay on the west, in other words the Eastern Shore of Maryland or the Land of Pleasant Living.

A “living relationship,” then, is what bishops are to engage in as the Book of Common Prayer (p. 517) service carefully outlines in the Examination given to the bishop-elect before the laying on of hands by other bishops. Briefly they are as follows:

- A bishop in God’s holy Church is called to be one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ’s resurrection and interpreting the gospel and to testify to Christ’s sovereignty as

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Lord of lords and King of kings;

- A bishop is called to guard the faith, unity and discipline of the Church;
- A bishop is to celebrate and to provide for the administration of the sacraments of the New Covenant;
- A bishop is to ordain priests and deacons and to join in ordaining bishops;
- A bishop is to be in all things a faithful pastor and wholesome example for the entire flock of Christ.
- A bishop along with fellow bishops is to share in the leadership of the Church throughout the world;
- The bishop's heritage is the faith of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and those of every generation who have looked to God in hope;
- A bishop's joy will be to follow him who came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

This examination makes it clear where the authority of the bishop comes from. It makes it clear what the bishop's responsibility is and with whom one shares ministry. Primarily, for me, it makes it clear that the bishop is not to be served, but is called to serve following the example of our Lord Jesus who said to his disciples as He says to us: "I among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:24)

A living relationship does not mean sitting behind a desk or on a cathedra (the bishop's chair) or even in front of a computer screen as I'm doing right now as I write this to you. A living relationship that serves, encourages, and supports all baptized people with their gifts and ministries can

only be accomplished when the bishop enters into a personal connection with the clergy and the laity committed to his or her charge. Just as a shepherd tending sheep is not a shepherd if she or he does not have contact with the flock, how can a bishop be a pastor when he or she is not available and accessible for consultation, discussion, and compassionate understanding when needed?

A "living relationship" serves, encourages, and supports

For instance, recently I spent a considerable amount of time one afternoon with a cleric discussing some challenges in this person's ministry. Whoever sees that, no one needs to know about it, but that can be multiplied by any number of instances over and over again. This is where EPISKOPE is exercised or lived or experienced by being in relationship with another child of God.

My friends, there is much more to being a bishop than meets the eye. What I have shared with you is only background information that carries with it many more observations and stories to tell. Once again, let me thank you for allowing me the privilege and responsibility of being your bishop and allowing me to enter into a living relationship with you, all of you.

God bless you always,
Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

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