



# The Episcopal Diocese *of* Vermont

## **2021 Diocesan Convention Courtesy Resolutions**

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# Courtesy Resolution Thanking Bishop Shannon MacVean-Brown

RESOLVED, That the 188<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Vermont recognize and thank Bishop Shannon MacVean-Brown for her exceptional leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, as she led us in prayer, gave counsel to the clergy and lay leaders of the diocese and exemplified, through word and action, a life lived in hope with a strong commitment to justice.

## **Background:**

Bishop Shannon was not even six months into her episcopacy when COVID-19 brought the world to a standstill. She has demonstrated true leadership and resilience from its earliest days—even before a national emergency was declared on March 13, 2020.

Immediately she gathered us in prayer via Zoom, launching what would become the Green Mountain Online Abbey and leading online Sunday morning worship. Guided both by her ongoing concern for the most vulnerable among us and her sensitivity to the spiritual needs of Vermont Episcopalians, Bishop Shannon gathered a trusted team of volunteers from around the diocese to support new ways of worshipping together online and to create thoughtful reopening guidelines to assist the congregations of our diocese to regather safely.

By the end of March 2020, Bishop Shannon had started to meet weekly with the clergy and those in Local Ministry Support Teams. In these 90-minute Zoom calls, she offered pastoral support, prayer, wisdom, and advice to those entrusted with the “cure of souls,” all of whom were walking in a totally new landscape with no guideposts along the way. Her overarching concern that there be no super-spreader event in the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont became the basis for decisions about gathering in person and having Communion, something which we could only celebrate remotely (with pre-consecrated elements) on Christmas 2020 and Easter 2021, until congregations began to worship together this summer. This sacrifice not only affected our congregations but also affected our bishop, who fasted from the Sacrament as did we!

Bishop Shannon has unflinchingly taken on the difficult aspects of leadership, notably, inviting the diocese to look deeply and carefully at its precarious financial condition. She has opened conversations with other dioceses to help us find new ways to live out God’s mission in Vermont. Through her leadership and vision, the THRIVE team has begun its work.

Bishop Shannon works unceasingly toward racial reckoning and urges us to do likewise. In her April 20, 2021, letter, she wrote that she prays, “that we face into this work and do not turn back. Because it will not be easy, and it will not be quick. But for today, at least [with the verdict in the George Floyd murder], it feels as though progress is possible, and we have taken a first step toward the kind of reconciliation that leads to Beloved Community in which everyone knows how it feels to be free.” She continues to lead us in the quest to affirm everyone’s God-given dignity.

Through ever-changing conditions, our Bishop “steadied the ship” when we were tossed to and fro with no end in sight—reminding us that as Christians, we are first and foremost a “people of hope.”

Bishop Shannon embodies Romans 12:12—“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer”—as well as the words of Ernest Hemingway, who said: “Courage is grace under pressure.” The Convention offers its deepest gratitude to her, and to the God who brought her to us.

# Courtesy Resolution Thanking and Commending the Diocesan COVID-19 Response Team and Congregational Leaders

RESOLVED, That the 188<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Vermont thank the members of the Diocesan COVID-19 Response Team (the Reverend Dr. Fred Moser, chair; Dr. Anne Guillot; the Reverends Earl Kooperkamp, Amy Spagna, Rob Spainhour, and Bob Wilson; and Bishop Shannon MacVean-Brown) for their ongoing work to keep us spiritually and physically healthy; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the convention express its gratitude for the on-the-ground efforts of congregational leadership, clergy and lay, in implementation of these safeguards.

## **Background**

Originally convened in 2020 as the Diocesan Restart Team, the members of what is now the COVID-19 Response Team took on an open-ended commitment to work together to balance the spiritual needs of the people of The Episcopal Church in Vermont with the physical safety of all in Vermont and beyond. For nearly the full duration of the pandemic, the team has met at length on a weekly basis. In the course of their work, the members have developed a five-step guideline for congregations to resume in-person worship safely and reopen our church buildings for other activities. They have evaluated each congregation's proposal to do so for approval by the bishop and they have continued to adapt safe practices as the coronavirus has evolved.

The clergy members come from Trinity, Shelburne; Good Shepherd, Barre; St. James, Woodstock; Holy Trinity, Swanton; and St. Mark's, Newport. Dr. Guillot comes from UVM Medical Center and the Larner College of Medicine at UVM, as well as the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Burlington. They all have worked collaboratively with—and stood in solidarity with—Bishop Shannon through this trying time.

The Convention thanks each of them for doing an often-thankless job in good faith and staying committed to this work as the pandemic continues longer than anyone would have expected.

Likewise, the Convention thanks all leaders in congregations for their commitment to keep their fellow Episcopalians—and by extension, members of their families and communities—safe by following the guidance of the response team and the bishop. We particularly thank the leadership of those congregations without clergy support who have taken on the same responsibilities for assuring the well-being of members of their congregation.

## Courtesy Resolution Thanking THRIVE

RESOLVED, That the 188<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont voice its gratitude for the creation of the THRIVE taskforce (Taskforce for Hope, Revitalization, Innovation, Vision, and Efficiency) composed of Diocese of Vermont clergy and lay leaders and chaired by Ellen McCulloch-Lovell of Christ Church, Montpelier, and the Rev. Scott Neal of St. Paul's, White River Junction; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we give thanks for the leadership and vision of our Bishop, Shannon MacVean-Brown; we hold in prayer those leaders who have taken roles of responsibility in leading the work of THRIVE; we offer prayers for its success at this crucial time in the life of our diocese; and we hold our own hearts and desires open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as we welcome the challenge of implementing the recommendations we will receive at the 189<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Vermont.

### Background

Bishop Shannon announced in July (see her letter, [Building a Bridge to the Future](#)) that the diocese faces a financial cliff, and she appointed a task force of clergy and lay leaders to consider “how new models of ministry and new collaborative relationships might offer our diocese ways to discern our future.”

An article posted on the diocesan website on October 13 of this year described the work of the task force (see the full article [here](#)). It notes that in addition to the chairs, THRIVE will “operate through three subgroups focused on key areas of concern: financial sustainability, chaired by the Very Rev. Greta Getlein of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul; missional vitality, chaired by Luke Krueger of St. Paul's, Wells; and governance and collaboration, chaired by the Rev. Bob Leopold of St. Andrew's, Colchester.

“At its initial meeting in late July, the task force heard from Bishop Sean Rowe of the Dioceses of Northwestern Pennsylvania and Western New York, who made a presentation titled, ‘Adaptive Opportunities in Vermont.’ Rowe, who holds a PhD in organizational learning and leadership, will speak at the diocesan convention on November 6 to share his thinking about opportunities for adaptive change in the Episcopal Church and his experience leading the partnership between the two dioceses he serves.”

THRIVE's chairs, Ellen McCulloch-Lovell and the Rev. Scott Neal, will also make a presentation to the convention on November 6.

The task force meetings will be facilitated by Heidi Kim, a Minnesota-based consultant who formerly served on Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's staff as officer for racial reconciliation. Kim met with the group on September 30 and facilitated online discussions that addressed the group's hopes and dreams as well as areas of concern. The article says that Kim told participants that “even though this work feels very technical ... that this is a ministry, that you are engaging in discipleship ... and I, for one, am very grateful to you, because I think that what happens in Vermont will set a model for the rest of the Episcopal Church.”

THRIVE's report to the diocese is due by Pentecost Sunday, June 5, 2022, with a final report and recommendations to be made at next year's diocesan convention. This resolution asks that members of the diocese hold in prayer the work of the task force and its subgroups over the next year as they consider possibilities of collaboration with other dioceses in northern New England and also look at ways to reshape our parishes and diocese to meet the challenges of the coming "new normal" post-pandemic time.

It also invites us to hold our hearts and desires open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, flowing through the work of the task force, as we welcome the challenge of implementing the recommendations we will receive. It invites us to pray that we may undertake our part of this work with dedication and joy and embrace the possibilities that flow from it. Even as we hold before God our natural anxiety when facing change, we are filled with excitement and hope at the anticipation of a new day to come!

## **Courtesy Resolution Thanking and Honoring Dr. Gerald (Gerry) Davis**

RESOLVED, That the 188<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont offer its hearty thanks to Gerald (Gerry) Davis, our diocesan treasurer, who retires this year after six years of financial service to the diocese, years which included navigating an episcopal transition, challenges of COVID-19, and a new look at the fiscal realities of our diocese; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we wish Gerry, and his wonderful wife, Karin—both long-time members and leaders at our Cathedral—delightful times together as they turn their attention to the next chapters in their lives; may they have many delicious meals, accompanied by lovely wine, as they contemplate their next adventures as a couple.

### **Background**

Gerry became Diocesan Treasurer during the tenure of Bishop Ely and remained treasurer through the transition to Bishop MacVean-Brown. Throughout his six years as Diocesan Treasurer, he expressed a calm, non-anxious presence. He did this as the diocese took a deeper look at our finances and began to re-assess what new and creative fiscal measures will be needed in the future to enable our diocese not only to survive, but also to thrive, in the “new normal” that is unfolding.

Gerry brought his intelligence, level-headedness, his skill as a pulmonologist, his talent as a photographer, and his teaching prowess to his role as treasurer. His presence at the podium during Diocesan Convention, and online during the pandemic, helped us relax—and stay awake and alert. His talent as a photographer gave us just the exposure we needed for a clear budget picture and his focused PowerPoint presentations—understandable to the least fiscally sophisticated of his listeners—provided the information needed to make thoughtful decisions.

Having a physician as treasurer for more than half a decade was the medicine needed for our diocese. We were reassured and delighted when photos were posted of our treasurer, Gerry Davis, M.D., administering a COVID jab to our Bishop, Shannon MacVean-Brown—sitting in her Cathedra (the bishop’s chair) as part of the BIPOC clinics at the Cathedral.

We are grateful for Gerry’s calm and re-assuring “bedside manner”—and his gentle humor—at those times our fiscal waters became more turbulent, and we wish Gerry and Karin the very best.

# **Courtesy Resolution Thanking and Commending Pamela Van de Graaf**

RESOLVED, That the 188<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Vermont offer thanks and appreciation to Pamela Van de Graaf for her service as Assistant to the Bishop since June 2017 and send her best wishes on her retirement scheduled for later this year.

## **Background**

After a 25-year career as a teacher, Pamela Van de Graaf joined the Ministry Support Team of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont as Assistant to the Bishop in June 2017. In that capacity, she served with Bishop Thomas C. Ely until September 2019, and with Bishop Shannon MacVean-Brown since that time.

As Assistant to the Bishop, Pamela has been responsible for a wide range of duties, including arranging the bishop's schedule, organizing the meetings of many diocesan committees and councils, taking minutes for Diocesan Council and at Convention, and organizing and keeping track of the paperwork for the inquirers, postulants, and candidates in the Commission on Ministry process.

Pamela also played a major role in organizing and facilitating the May 2019 Special Convention at which Bishop MacVean-Brown was elected, and the September 2019 service at which she was consecrated. Since March 2020, Pamela has risen to the challenge of helping the bishop and other members of the diocesan staff administer affairs remotely to a dispersed membership. For nearly four years, Pamela has carried out all her responsibilities with skill, civility, and congeniality.

The Convention expresses its sincere appreciation to Pamela Van de Graaf for her work as Assistant to the Bishop and sends her prayerful good wishes for a happy and healthy retirement.

# Courtesy Resolution Thanking and Commending the Reverend Canon Lee Alison Crawford

RESOLVED, That the 188<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Vermont offer thanks and appreciation to the Reverend Canon Lee Alison Crawford, Ph.D., for her many years of service on the Commission on Ministry for the Diocese of Vermont, including the last six years as chair.

## **Background**

The Commission on Ministry is one of the important governing institutions of the Diocese of Vermont. For many years, the Reverend Canon Lee Alison Crawford, Ph.D., has served as a member of the Commission, and, since 2015, she has served as chair of the Commission. Her term on the Commission comes to an end at this Convention.

The Commission on Ministry is charged by canon with two responsibilities. First, it must meet with inquirers for ordination, as both deacons and priests, who have been recommended by a parish discernment committee, and determine whether to recommend them to the Standing Committee and Bishop for the status of postulants. Similarly, the Commission meets with postulants who wish to become candidates for ordination after several years in the formation process, and with candidates who wish to be ordained as deacons or priests. At any given time, there are typically between 10 and 20 persons at various stages of this process.

The Commission's second responsibility is to review the procedures and standards for ordination in the Diocese of Vermont, and to recommend changes in those procedures and standards, as appropriate, to the Bishop, the Standing Committee, and/or the Diocesan Convention. These recommendations must be consistent with the churchwide canons as established and modified by General Convention.

As chair of the Commission on Ministry, Lee Crawford has carried out these responsibilities with perspicacity, grace, and good humor. She has been a good counselor and companion to the people in the process, helping them discern their future with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Convention commends her for her diligence, insights, and resourcefulness, and sends her its prayerful best wishes for the years ahead.

# Courtesy Resolution Thanking and Commending Joshua Cheney

RESOLVED, That the 188<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont offer thanks and appreciation to Joshua Cheney for his service as Secretary of the annual Convention of the Diocese of Vermont, a role he took on in 2017 and has fulfilled with dedication and admirable flexibility through this, his last convention as secretary, and wish him the very best in his future adventures.

## **Background**

Joshua Cheney has been an Episcopalian from childhood: he grew up at Saint Mary's, Northfield, where his parents and family faithfully attended for years. These days, he attends All Saints', South Burlington. Many of us have seen him grow up in the diocese and were pleased when he joined the Ministry Support Team as administrative assistant in 2010.

Josh remained a valuable member of the team until his departure in 2013. He now works for Vermont Information Technology Leaders, which operates the Vermont Health Information Exchange.

In 2014, Diocesan Convention elected Josh to serve as first lay alternate deputy to the 2015 General Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah, where he helped the deputation monitor legislative committees and had opportunities to serve on the floor of the House of Deputies. His dedication and upbeat attitudes were gifts in the intense and busy environment of General Convention.

In 2017, Josh took on the role of Secretary of Diocesan Convention, and he helped guide us all through a two-day gathering in the unfamiliar environment of the Jackson Gore Resort in Ludlow. The secretary's tasks are year-round and involve follow-up on some convention resolutions, service on the Dispatch of Business Committee (the past year as chair) which plans conventions, and helping to run the current convention.

Josh's first three conventions came during the tenure of Bishop Tom Ely: 2017 at Jackson Gore, 2018 at the Hilton, Burlington, and the special electing convention at the Cathedral in 2019. He was delighted with the election of now Bishop Shannon MacVean-Brown and served as secretary at her first convention at the Hilton, Burlington, and then for our first Zoom convention in 2020. He has decided to step down after this year.

Josh has been efficient, good-humored, and perhaps most important, flexible through his tenure as secretary of our annual gatherings. Who can forget Josh's non-poker face at Diocesan Convention in 2018, when he pulled Bishop Tom's name in a raffle of baked goods from Mission Farm? Josh's spontaneous expression of surprise, followed by a huge smile and laughter, delighted those of us watching, even though we did not know until he announced who had won what had provoked such a reaction.

We look forward to any new ways he might find to remain involved in the diocese and hope that he will be able to find time to travel and enjoy many adventures.

# Courtesy Resolution Thanking and Commending Stephen Burnett

RESOLVED, That the 188<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Vermont offer thanks and appreciation to Stephen Burnett for the financial assessment of the diocese that he shared earlier this year with Bishop Shannon MacVean-Brown, the diocesan staff, and diocesan committee leadership.

## **Background**

Stephen Burnett is a retired partner of the international accounting firm Deloitte. He served as chair of the Finance Committee for the Diocese of Atlanta for 27 years and has taught accounting and financial administration at two Episcopal seminaries.

In the spring of 2021, Stephen Burnett visited Vermont to consult with Bishop Shannon MacVean-Brown and diocesan leaders on the state of the diocese's finances. He met with the bishop and diocesan staff, reviewed the diocese's financial records for the last several years, met with the diocesan auditors and investment advisors, and met with the committees that have budget, investment, and other financial responsibilities.

Following these meetings and consultations, Stephen Burnett prepared a financial assessment of the diocese that he shared with the bishop, canons, and diocesan committee leadership. That assessment noted that the diocese's revenues and expenditures would be substantially out of balance by early 2023, and that actions needed to be taken over the next year to return the diocese to a sustainable financial condition. A restructuring of the diocese's committees with financial responsibilities was also included among the recommendations in the assessment. The Convention extends its appreciation to Stephen Burnett for the time he spent on this financial review, and for the depth and candor of his assessment and recommendations, so that, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we may continue spreading God's message and serving God's people.

# Courtesy Resolution Thanking and Commending Dr. Catherine Meeks

RESOLVED, That the 188<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Vermont offer thanks and appreciation, in advance, to Dr. Catherine Meeks, Executive Director of the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing, for her presentation sharing her thoughts with us on the dismantling of racism.

## Background

Almost two decades ago, the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta established a commission—the Beloved Community: Commission for Dismantling Racism—to heal the chronic illness of racism in our faith community by creating awareness of its existence in our ongoing spiritual formation. In 2016, following up on the commission’s work, the Diocese of Atlanta decided to establish a Center for Racial Healing as a place where clergy, lay leaders, and community members can engage in dialogue that leads to real and lasting change. The center is committed to the principle that changed people can create change in our institutions, which in turn becomes change in our society.

Dr. Catherine Meeks chaired the Beloved Community Commission and is now the Executive Director of the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing. She has more than four decades of experience in the work of dismantling racism. Catherine Meeks is a professor emerita at Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, where she held the Clara Carter Acree Distinguished Professorship of Socio-Cultural Studies. She earned her Ph.D. at Emory University and is the author, co-author, or editor of six books, including *Living into God’s Dream: Dismantling Racism in America* and *Passionate for Justice: Ida B Wells as Prophet for Our Times*. Catherine Meeks has said that “the core of her work has been with people who have been marginalized because of economic status, race, gender or physical ability as they pursue liberation, justice and access to resources that can help lead them to health, wellness and a more abundant life.” She went on to say that this work “grows out of her understanding of her call to the vocation of teacher as well as her realization that all of humanity is one family which God desires to unite.” We look forward to Dr. Catherine Meeks’ sharing her insights on dismantling racism and building a just and beloved community with us.

# Courtesy Resolution Thanking and Commending Bishop Sean Rowe

RESOLVED, That the 188<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Vermont offer thanks and appreciation, in advance, to the Rt. Rev. Dr. Sean W. Rowe, Bishop of the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania and Bishop Provisional of the Diocese of Western New York, for his presentation sharing his thoughts with us on diocesan collaboration and partnerships.

## **Background**

The Rt. Rev. Sean Rowe was ordained Bishop of the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania in 2007 and became Bishop Provisional of Western New York in 2019. He previously served as Bishop Provisional of the Diocese of Bethlehem from 2014 until 2018.

A native of western Pennsylvania, Sean Rowe graduated from Grove City College in 1997 with a B.A. in history. After studies at Virginia Theological Seminary, Rowe returned to his home diocese in 2000 after receiving his M.Div. and served as a parish priest in a small town in western Pennsylvania. In 2007, he was elected Bishop of Northwestern Pennsylvania at the age of 32, and for nearly 12 years he was the youngest bishop in the Episcopal Church. Bishop Rowe earned a Ph.D. in organizational learning and leadership at Gannon University in Erie in 2014.

When the Rt. Rev. R. William Franklin announced his plans to retire as Bishop of the Diocese of Western New York, the adjoining dioceses of Western New York and Northwestern Pennsylvania decided to explore a partnership in which the two dioceses would share a single bishop and a single staff. This plan was approved by a special convention of both dioceses held in September 2018. Upon Bishop Franklin's retirement in April 2019, Bishop Rowe took office as Bishop Provisional of Western New York.

The idea behind the partnership was not simply to save money, but rather to collaborate closely in mission and revitalize the Episcopal Church along the southeastern shores of Lake Erie. We in Vermont look forward to Bishop Rowe's sharing his thoughts on this partnership with us.