

## **Highlights from the 172<sup>nd</sup> Diocesan Council**

**Saturday, February 27, 2021**

**Held virtually with production based at Camp Allen in Navasota, Texas**

### **Opening Service of Morning Prayer**

**8:30 a.m.**

This year's Opening Service of Morning Prayer with participants across the diocese was nothing short of amazing. It took place at 8:30 a.m., and led by the Most Rev. Dr. Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa. Bishop Thabo Makgoba reflected primarily on the global problems that the pandemic has caused, particularly in poor countries, which will face an uncertain and complicated future due to their vulnerability in many areas such as health, poverty, and the lack of appropriate medical care.

The risks are facing freedom and democracy in African countries and also in America. He emphasized the violent acts that took place in Washington DC and were followed and lamented around the world.

He invited the Church to awaken curiosity and allow curiosity to help us see God's action through reconciliation and love as the essential tools to show the world the love of God.

God's unconditional love has the power to restore all humanity and heal the wounds caused by discrimination, hatred, and indifference.

### **Business Meeting**

**9:30 a.m.**

The Business Meeting was called to order, followed by Opening Prayer, a Council Instructional Video (due to the virtual setting), and the balloting test and survey by the Rev. Madeline Hawley.

### **The Report on Missions and Parishes by the Rev. Canon Joann Saylor**

A message by the Rev. Canon Joann Saylor and her team provided the Report on Missions and Parishes. They shared the stories of the perseverance of congregations throughout the diocese during the pandemic. From drive-through food drives to mask and blood drives, to the story of Emmanuel, Houston, and so many more inspiring stories. Transformation, formation, and outreach has been extraordinary. Partnerships with schools and on college campuses have been intentional throughout the pandemic. Ensuring meals for children and assistance with families struggling with online learning- all addressed and help extended whenever possible. Erasing racism and addressing mental health issues related to isolation have also been a

priority. Assisting parishes with having difficult conversations has also been top of mind. In retrospect, helping congregations pivot to online presences likely pales in comparison to the great works all of our missional communities, church plants, and established congregations have endeavored and over-delivered in their offerings. The work of Mission Amplification has been expansive and comprehensive, but most of all, necessary in the eyes of God. Canon Saylor began and concluded her message with a heartfelt thank you, replete with deep gratitude and appreciation, reiterating her team's desire to continue to serve the congregations across the Diocese of Texas.

## **The Bishop's Address- In Summary**

The IX Bishop of Texas, the Rt. Rev. C. Andrew Doyle, delivered his address discussing the heart wrenching realities over the past year while offering hope and celebrating the great works throughout our diocese.

He began by recalling that we have been together since 1838, and over those 183 years, we have faced numerous pandemics that included quarantine, likely with the most devastating in Texas. We have faced bitter weather, clean water shortages- all in the 1800s. We have experienced hurricanes- great wraths over many years that have brought about human loss and extensive damages to our homes and churches. So our current pandemic and most recent disaster, Winter Storm Uri, are nothing new to our diocese.

He reminded us of the "Stockdale Paradox": You must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, and at the same time, have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.

Filled with inspiration, yet the harsh realities of our current times, he encouraged us that as Christians, we know the reality of suffering. We know the way of the cross, the reality of Jesus. We know the faith of Jesus. We have our own understanding. The bishop offered Psalm 130:1- it tells the blunt truth, with no optimism but reminds us that we're not alone. It simply gives the words of our pain.

The bishop recalled that there are lots to lament over the past nearly 12 months of COVID, he expressed his gratefulness for the lamentations and journaling people across the diocese have shared with him, fully understanding the sadness of loss from attending church, visiting family, and the other opportunities of fellowship that bring us joy.

Bishop Doyle instructed us to not pretend that we're not lamenting. Part of this trauma, he reflected, is that the pandemic has brought about our shortcomings, and not only over liturgy, but also over shared life. But there is forgiveness, he encouraged.

There has been heightened awareness of the death of Black people at the hands of police. People of color have cried for years and White people can no longer turn a blind ear to it. We have seen an attack on our country, symbols of hatred. He pondered; how did this happen?

Just as vaccines were rolling out with consistency, then comes the storm with freezing temperatures, slowing down that process. We have had people literally freezing to death in cold of night- in their homes. The lonely and depressed have been left in greater darkness. Many of our homes suffered broken pipes, and millions of people forced into darkness, cold, and death.

We have suffered a NEW trauma- but we're not done with the others. There is a range of emotions, yet we watch for morning. God knows our pain and suffering and offers hope. With the pandemic, politics, over 500,000 lives lost and suffering continuing, those things will not have the last word. "God will have the last word!"

Like death, he said, we must deal with the blunt truth. We can't hide from it. There is hope in God. Hope in the Lord, for with that is steadfast love and great power. Hope in the Lord.

Encouragingly so, even in our lament, we have been about the business of making hope through clothing drives, mask drives, blood drives, blessings for pet drives. The bishop proclaimed: "You have done for others as you have done for Christ." We have helped thousands and thousands. The Diocese of Texas has done this.

Even as we have buried some, we have been doing the work of God. From continuing Harvey recovery work to counseling survivors to food distribution- the people of the diocese have made hope in our crucified lives. Through Texas Southern University, we are helping the vulnerable through their COVID-19 vaccination clinic and they continue to do that work; Northshore Church Plant in Houston hosted a drive-through baby shower in the midst of the pandemic for 80 expectant mothers; St. Christopher's, Austin, gave away \$55K in gifts to entities in the community that forwards efforts within its community; St. Julian of Norwich, Round Rock, and Soco Episcopal Community, Austin, helped to keep its neighbors housed by assisting with anti-eviction efforts; other great examples included how St. Mark's, Austin, forgave over \$500K of medical debt for members of its congregation through an amazing partnership with an entity dedicated to this effort. Another example is how St. James' Episcopal, Houston, honored the late George Floyd (the Black man killed at the hands of police officers in Minnesota this summer- witnessed by millions around the world) by giving away food to the housing project where he spent most of his life, only blocks away from its church. St. Luke's on the Lake, Austin, provided hurricane relief to our sisters and brothers in Louisiana. Within the small church network, St. Paul's, Freeport, hosted a drive-through Blessing of the Animals and Food Drive. The bishop explained that this is the work of the baptized, the supported church. He gave thanks to our Small Church Network.

A beautiful display of generosity and help offered when most needed: El Buen Samaritano gave away over 1.5 million dollars of money and weeks of food.

Then came the winter storm-Uri- and after having given away SO much, the people of the diocese still found the strength to begin a water ministry for those without water, while many of those working in this ministry had damage to their homes. Throughout this, Spouses' groups began to pray through their network. Thanks to Brené Brown, we raised a significant amount of money toward the winter disaster.

"We are everywhere- a group of baptized people- and it is a sight for your bishop to behold," he said. When the bishop laments, he says, when darkness closes around him, all he has to do is remember you, the people of the diocese- all the good and hope you make every day.

#### **Common and shared efforts he highlighted:**

- EHF- 1.5M into congregations and commissions- great engagement across the diocese
- During time of physical discipline- through online learning, together, with EHF we have given over \$372.8M since the sale of the hospital.
- We have given abundantly to the poor.

#### **Mission and church plants**

- 19 new communities being birthed that are supporting neighborhoods and helping people discover a life lived
- About a bold vision for where we would be as he once shared: We are well on our way to reaching our goal.
- We already have 90 plus missions and two are now congregations.
- Continuing to grow our campus missions- 21 undertaking the work of the diocese (Two of them opened the student center during the winter storm in a big way, with hundreds of them being fed and able to charge phones.) They knew to come because they heard something was happening at the Episcopal Student Center.

#### **Technological Innovations**

- Iona School online has exceeded expectations in their pivot.
- Congregations are online.
- We have sponsored new tech grants or upgrade tech grants.

There has been cross-pollination of our parishioners who attended different worship services and Bible studies. We're still learning about all we've done and what's ahead.

#### **Financial response:**

- Immediately able to push \$5M during Phase I Covid assistance
- Have Covid Phase II ready for next year
- Every year, EDOT puts more money back into parishes than parishes put into the diocese.
- In 2020, we doubled down and gave even more.
- As COVID crisis continues, we place dollars in service to you and your ministries.
- Prepared for 2021, ready to respond to URI.
- Racial Justice Initiative- First Scholarships have been awarded and we are repairing through work and ministry.

There's much more that can be seen online; people deeply involved and it's very exciting. Other mentioning of diocesan work includes

- EHF's ongoing work as it already understands the importance of health inequity in diverse groups
- Convenings of various groups across diocese
- Working with over 80 churches on a variety of issues
- Over 2000 unique visits to parishes
- Continuing to raise up clergy within the diocese
- Increasing the number of women in clergy

**The Texas Episcopalian** magazine shares this news and we want you to share it. Let others know how amazing you are! Share that you are doing incredible work. Celebrate this work.

### **360 Review**

We good scores about being a learning diocese. We learned that we foster learning for leaders within the diocese. We have a lot to do (for example, even more new adaptation to technology). Nevertheless, we will make it through this period. Hope to touch over 200,000 people per year.

### **Announcement of Sabbatical**

The bishop announced that he will be going on a sabbatical effective June 1. He plans to write, spend time with his family, nature, and get in touch with art as he completes 13 years with his diocesan family.

We must, however, face the truth of our brutal circumstances. The PTSD of these crises will leave a pastoral crisis that will far outlive the pandemic. "God is not finished with the church, with you or me," he said. As a leader, these have been some of the most difficult times from the burdens carried by our priests, deacons, and our people.

With all of his humanness, Bishop Doyle shared with his flock his own emotional suffering because, "there is no shame about suffering." Part of the truth is our own suffering and pain-our own lament. "We can't get through this without our shame." While the bishop has great resources and a supportive family, he holds that he has suffered. He knows that Christ loves him and takes him by the hand and heart. But as a leader, reveals it's hard.

As he closed, Bishop Doyle encouraged us to

- **Find** people during this time of trial and **recognize** our limits
- **Remember** to forgive ourselves and rest and when ready, **step** into the world again
- **Forgive** others and **reach** deep into our levels of resilience.
- Remember to **hope** and **see** the work of God's hands
- Know that when we are alone, we are not alone

You have first and foremost God. You have others. Reach out and when you can, do the same in return. Bishop Doyle reminds, "You are not, we are not EVER FORSAKEN! You are meant for belonging, love and care"

He reminded us that our Lord says that we know the blessings that he offers.

The Bishop of Texas said this is a prayer for him spiritually: We are not praying for easy lives but to be made stronger. We are to pray for gifts and talents for the work before us. The work will not be the miracle. We will be the miracle. The baptized of Christ gives our bishop faith and hope. The work you have accomplished, we have accomplished, has had a huge impact.

**Know that you are miraculous and that YOU are the miracles.**

## **Noonday Prayer**

Noonday Prayer was led by the Rev. Beth Holden

**Greetings from the wider church were extended by the following, all filled with beautiful remarks of encouragement**

- The Rt. Rev. George Sumner, Dallas
- The Rt. Rev. J. Scott Mayer, Fort Worth and Northwest, Texas
- The Rt. Rev. Michael Buerkel Hunn, Rio Grande
- The Rt. Rev. David Reed, West Texas
- The Most Rev. and Right Honourable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury
- The Most Rev. Michael Bruce Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church

## **Other reports, presentations and actions:**

- Reports from Supervisors and Tellers
- The Report of the Treasurer of the Diocese, Linda Mitchell
- 2021 Diocesan Budget, Bette Lehmberg
- The budget was passed.
- An entertaining video introducing clergy new to our diocese was featured.
- Celebration of New Communities by the Rev. Canon Joann Saylor
- Video presentations from diocesan institutions, schools, and other entities.
- Elections on Bishop's Nominations
- Voted that Council Offering would benefit St. Vincent's House's efforts toward their COVID-19 Vaccination efforts
- Reports from the Regional Bishops
- Announcement of Appointments by Bishop Doyle

**Adjournment, Doxology and Benediction by Bishop Doyle**