

Adaptability



**The Rev. Canon
Kevin D. Nichols**

“The only thing that is certain is uncertainty.” Your profile carefully outlines the challenges facing the diocese. To some of these I think I can bring vision and leadership, yet there are others for which I may simply bring more questions. Despite situations in society—like the need for racial reconciliation that literally breaks my heart—I am as hopeful as I have ever been that God is leading us to something wonderful beyond our imagining.

“The image of the Vine helps us describe how we are called to care for one another as God, the Original Gardner, care for us. We water it—baptism. We feed it—Eucharist. We provide structures that help it grow or not rot—teaching in formation. We prune it and fertilize it—stewardship for the sake of its fruitfulness. Sometimes we have to cut and transplant—parish closings, parish plantings.” These words from our Reimagining Process in The Episcopal Church of New Hampshire led us to develop Strategic Mission Initiatives— a new model for congregational vitality that I was honored to lead. In our gatherings and conversations with leaders from around the diocese we sought out those resilient places where God was loosening the soil for justice, mission and love. Simply stated, a number of our congregations were “on the verge” but lacked needed resources. They may be in an economically robust part of the state, but the clergy or lay leadership in place may not be properly equipped to go out on mission. They may be on fire for the Gospel, but straddled by old and dilapidated buildings... they simply needed an outstretched mission hand. We created a process whereby 3 new Congregation/Mission Locations would be selected and targeted each year for the next 3 years.

Some of our pilot efforts include: Epiphany, Newport—who utilized a Ministerial Excellence Fund Grant from ECF/Lilly to shift a Part-time clergy person to full-time. They then transformed their oversized worship space into an intimate space to launch a new Youth Singing Program successful in the UK. Trinity, Tilton—a congregation that closed in 2015, has been repurposed into a living site for Episcopal Service Corps (ESC). Town leaders joined in the renovations and the ESC Fellows are now envisioning a new faith community in the sanctuary space above them. St. John’s, Dunbarton could no longer afford a clergy-person and is helping us to discover how a Lay-Vicar may be our newest leadership model. And, Four Congregations in the Claremont Region—including a Lutheran parish—are reconfiguring their mission and ministry while maintaining their unique identities under the leadership of a sole Rector/Pastor. All four initiative are examples of adaptive thinking—involving many voices—and ultimately listening to God’s still voice.

In many respects the rural towns and medium-size cities of the Diocese of Bethlehem are similar to New Hampshire, where most of my ministry has unfolded. The added opportunity to serve in a more diverse urban setting is something I have longed for since my seminary days in Baltimore, when my most memorable ministry took place in an urban, predominantly African-American parish. Little did I know that an adopted son from Cambodia would teach me about diversity and race in ways I never imagined.

Walkabouts

Tuesday, April 17, 2018

St Stephen’s Episcopal Church

**3900 Mechanicsville Rd
Whitehall, PA**

Wednesday, April 18, 2018

St Alban’s Episcopal Church

**2848 St Albans Dr
Sinking Spring, PA**

Thursday April 19, 2018

(Livestreamed)

St Paul’s Episcopal Church

**276 Church St
Montrose, PA**

Friday, April 20 2018

St Stephen’s Pro-Cathedral

**35 S Franklin St
Wilkes-Barre, PA**



Our Bishop Nominees

MARCH 11, 2018

www.bishopsearchdiobeth.org

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**The Rev. Canon Ruth
Woodliff-Stanley**

We too in Colorado are a diocese comprised mostly of small congregations who face the challenge of changing contexts and diminishing resources. This landscape requires we marshal diocesan resources in new ways to serve their needs. Historically, as one part of its mission, our diocesan Foundation offered significant stewardship programming to congregations. This was accomplished by the direction of a large annual stream of diocesan income to the Foundation to manage and use for operations and programming. In recent years, we began to see opportunity costs in persisting with this older structure and use of resources. The leadership structures and flow of revenue, while initially useful, over time created a separation between the Foundation and the Standing Committee and Bishop that we began to see was hindering us in working as one body all moving in the same direction.

We were becoming clear that serving small churches with diminishing resources required a new structure, new roles, and new ways of directing the revenue stream that had been stewarded faithfully for decades by the Foundation. We needed to work in alignment with one vision and purpose to support local ministries, rather than have two “guardians” of the diocese. Yet, there were stakeholders in each part of the structure who did not initially welcome the idea of change and saw risks of losing priorities and roles important to them. To change required a well thought out process. It was daunting to me at first because I hold relationships dear with those who held divergent positions on the best path forward. Nevertheless, my bishop asked me to craft conversations and process to effect structural change that would allow both the Foundation and the Standing Committee to best serve local communities.

Our adaptive work involved shifting from an assumption either that the status quo would suffice or that the outcome would require us to throw some people or interests under the bus to achieve the aims of others. I had to believe we could in the end hear together one call from God. The first phase of the work was to get a clear, comprehensive picture of the range of concerns and points of view. The second phase involved exploring options that might address the most substantial concerns on all sides. The third phase involved testing a draft of a plan and gauging buy-in then course correcting where necessary. In each phase, I brought together key stakeholders deemed to have the best skill set for that part of the work—all under the bishop’s guidance. By the time we got to the step of actually implementing the change, we had done the kind of thorough work that led us to an outcome that seemed truly right to everyone. The decisions made allow the Foundation to sharpen its focus on stewarding our financial resources while also allowing the diocese to initiate new offerings in areas of stewardship development, outreach, and back office support that will tangibly support the mission of our smaller congregations.

Walkabouts

Please Plan To Attend—All Are Welcome

*Please submit your Walkabout questions
for the Bishop Nominees*

In advance to bishoptransitiondiobeth@gmail.com

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www.bishopsearchdiobeth.org

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located under the **Nominees** tab*