

The presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church, the Office of General Convention, the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies are already thinking about the next General Convention, which is scheduled for summer 2021 in Baltimore. Each diocese in the Episcopal Church is also thinking about its annual convention. Local conditions vary from one diocese to another. The constitutions and canons of the dioceses are not identical. Therefore, dioceses may reach different conclusions about their annual conventions.

Here in the Diocese of North Carolina, the bishops, officers, governance bodies of the Diocese (Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, Convention Committee on Dispatch of Business and Commission on Constitution and Canons), staff of the Diocese and our event planning professionals have been meeting regularly to assess the outlook for our Annual Convention, scheduled for November 20-21, 2020.

We will have Annual Convention, but only when state and local regulations allow it and the Diocese's medical guidelines can be followed. The minimum size of our convention is constrained by constitutional requirements for a quorum in both the clergy and lay orders. We recognize that some clergy and lay delegates fall into the "higher risk" category for COVID-19, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control.

A two-day convention on the appointed weekend in Winston-Salem remains the official plan at present. Contracts are in place with the facilities manager in Winston-Salem. We pray that our world will soon be in less peril from COVID-19 and that our convention can proceed as usual. However, it is prudent to identify alternatives in case one becomes necessary. The first alternative is a streamlined, one-day Annual Convention in Winston-Salem on Saturday, November 21. The second alternative is to postpone Annual Convention. You may remember that in 2003, our convention had to be postponed because a winter storm struck our area on the day before the convention was to begin. We held a cramped but successful one-day Annual Convention several months later.

The bishops and governance bodies of the Diocese will make a collective decision about the convention later in 2020. Please stand by for further information. Meanwhile, we ask clergy and lay delegates to continue to reserve November 20-21 on their calendars. Vestries should elect lay delegates as usual and submit their names to the Diocese by the August 3 deadline.

Let us assure you that diocesan programs will continue into 2021 if no Annual Convention can be held in 2020. The Standing Committee, Diocesan Council and Trustees have canonical authority to "keep the Diocese running" while an Annual Convention is pending.

Meanwhile, the Commission on Constitution and Canons is drafting amendments to the constitution and canons of the Diocese that currently prohibit an Annual Convention by teleconference. A traditional Annual Convention must meet in order to adopt any such legislation.

If it is not possible to hold either a two-day or a one-day Annual Convention safely in 2020, there will be a virtual gathering of the Diocese by teleconference in November or December. Such a virtual gathering cannot conduct the official business of Annual Convention, but it would be an opportunity to share fellowship, information and mutual support. Clerical and lay delegates, as well as others in the Diocese, would be invited to attend virtually.

The Diocese encourages suggestions, questions and statements of concern about Annual Convention from clergy and lay persons in the Diocese. Please address them to the secretary by email to

secretary@episdionc.org, by calling Diocesan House at (919) 834-7474 and leaving a voicemail for extension 5416, or by mail to the secretary at Diocesan House.

We give thanks to God for your perseverance in leading the church in these trying times, and we ask for your prayers as the leadership of the Diocese faces these and many other decisions that we did not anticipate merely three months ago.

Yours in Christ,

/s/ The Rt. Rev. Sam Rodman, Bishop Diocesan

/s/ The Rt. Rev. Anne Hodges-Copple, Bishop Suffragan

/s/ Charles L. Till, Secretary of Convention

/s/ Martha B. Alexander, Chair, Convention Committee on the Dispatch of Business